十月ユウ
銀の十字架とドラキュリア
クロス
Silver Cross & Draculea
ファンタジア文庫

Silver Cross and Draculea is a light novel series written by Totsuki Yuu (十月ユウ) and illustrated by Yasaka Minato (八坂 ミナト).

Published by Fujimi Fantasia Bunko, the series has concluded with 5 volumes.

Story Synopsis

"Impossible... Why are you not following my orders!? Clearly I sucked your blood, why!?"

On the very first day of high school, the youth subscribing to the philosophy of "absolutely ordinary everyday life," Kujou Hisui, encountered disaster head on: he was attacked by Rushella Dahm Draculea, the vampire who had lost her memory. Rushella was greatly intrigued to find her vampire powers ineffective against Hisui. Not only did she make Hisui's home her own, she even enrolled in his school to stick to him--

Hisui had no choice but to help Rushella regain her memory. But before one crisis could be resolved, many more had risen. With tempting advances from the mysterious Sudou Mei, and kidnapped by the girl from the Supernatural Investigations Section in search of Rushella, Hisui's ordinary life has been replaced by its complete opposite, drama--

Romantic comedy and supernatural action in a school setting!

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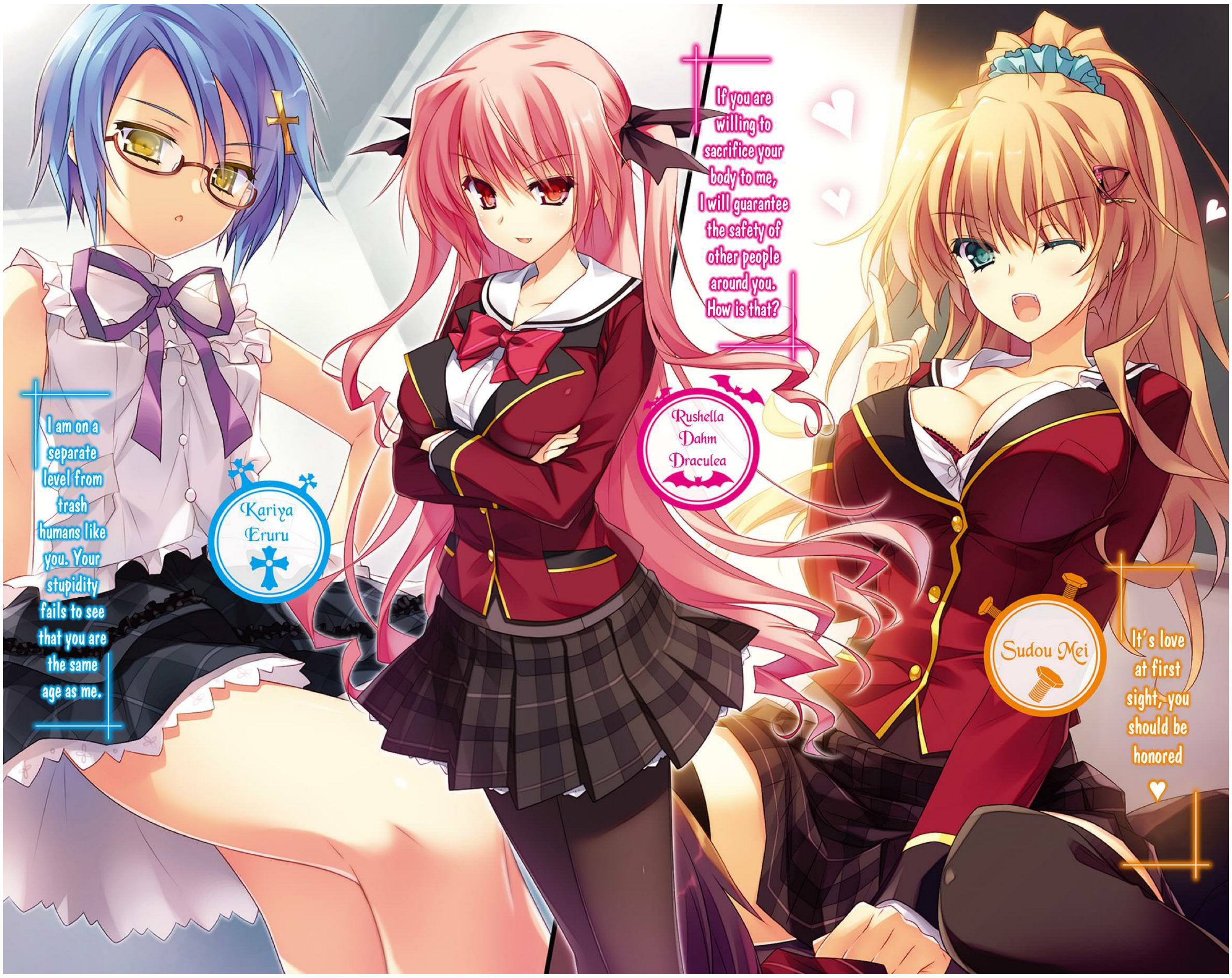
I am on a separate level from trash humans like you. Your stupidity fails to see that you are the same age as me.
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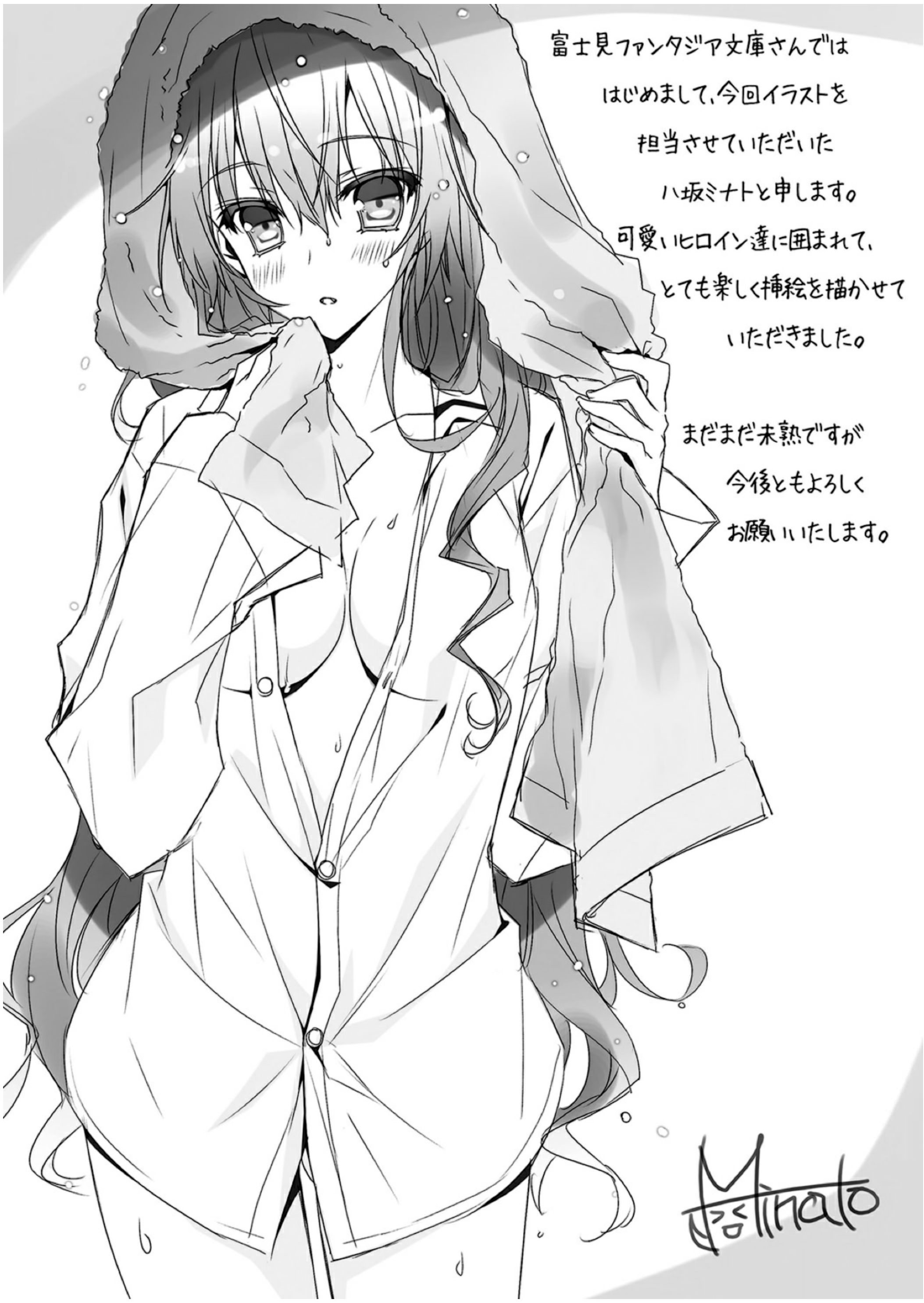


富士見ファンタジア文庫さんでは
はじめまして、今回イラストを
担当させていただいた
八坂ミナトと申します。
可愛いヒロイン達に囲まれて、
とても楽しく挿絵を描かせて
いただきました。

まだまだ未熟ですが
今後ともよろしく
お願いいたします。

Minato

Prologue

A shadow dances deep in the night.

Leaping from one rooftop to another, from building to building. With an inhuman agility and enthralling steps, bathed under the moonlight's glory, any witnesses would have been instantly smitten by her.

Those springing steps, allowed people to imagine her feminine beauty. And to be truthful, a pair of long legs with dancing-like steps, can only belong to a young lady in her prime.

The night wrapped around her snow white skin, further refines her supernatural beauty.

If we were to discuss her figure; a beautiful black dress tightly wrapped around her body, with only her cleavage prominently displayed, her full chest was unconcealed by the dark.

Her most captivating parts are her ruby red lips.

Dripping with erotic energy, be it a man or a woman, no one would be able to resist being entranced by them. But occasionally, those lips reveal the secret of her nature.

A pair of sharp fangs.

The lips reveal a pair of teeth, abnormally sharp and slender. Even with such alluring beauty, people can still feel the hidden danger.

Danger – with the beauty that almost makes one want to be bitten.

Beauty in the night, with the strength and power to leap from building to building, and the fangs.

Based on this world's legends, it is the truth of her body.

That is – the king of the night.

That is – a vampire.

With leaping skills way above humans, people always thought they had bat-like wings.

While discussing about vampire legends, it is almost certain it is this kind of blood-drinking animal. Maybe because bats can zip across the night like a shadow, thus people imagine these kind of things.

In reality, there are no wings, but certainly eyes like those of a predatory bird exist.

She is thirsty right now.

It is a thirst from the depth of her soul.

The only way to satisfy her thirst - is one thing.

"Found you..."

Whispering in a sexy and loveable voice, the girl stops.

Her eyes flicking a scarlet spark, locking on to the prey.

Her sight locked on to a young man, walking alone in an alley.

He appears to be the same age as her – although it is impossible to tell the age of a vampire – about 16 or 17.

To a female vampire, it's a great catch – a slender and good looking boy.

Slender body, decent looks, with matching tea-colored hair. In the street barely illuminated by lamplight, it is possible to mistake him for a girl. Although not as good as her, his white skin is both glossy and tender.

"He looks delicious~"

Finding such a prized prey, the girl could not resist licking her lips.

In an instant, she lands in front of the youth.

As if stunned by the beauty landing in front of him, the youth freezes.

"Don't be frightened, human."

To the apprehensive prey in front of her, the girl reveals a warm smile.

"I am called, Rushella Dahm Dracula. I am a vampire of the highest class, one of the purest bloodlines. Please be honored, that you were chosen by me."

The boy still does not react.

It is unsurprising.

A human meeting a vampire at night, they would usually react like this.

"I couldn't but help to notice the delicious smell of your blood. I was drawn by your flavor. I thought you might have been bleeding, but it looks like you are not injured. However such a delicious smell still fills my nose – such a sweet, sweet smell."

During her nightly stroll, she suddenly smelled the delicious flavor.

Attracted by the smell, she landed in front of him.

"Come... Come serve me."

She puts her arm around his shoulder, revealing her chillingly sharp fangs, and moves toward the left side of his neck.

No need to tip-toe, no need to bend down. A perfect height.

It is even more delightful.

All one needs is to enjoy.

Rushella pierced his skin with her fangs, and began to drink his blood, drop by drop.

"..."

It was beyond "just" delicious.

A bit dense, full of the wonderful essence of youth.

This delicacy is clearly not only for quenching the thirst, it is also definitely the entree for tonight.

Just a few drops, and her thirst subsided.

Such a high class blood definitely cannot be a last meal.

According to vampire legends, after drinking one's blood for several nights, you can turn him into a servant.

Rushella sank into this sweet fantasy, then was brought back to reality by a sentence.

"I say... this really is painful."

Ah?

She suddenly backs away from him.

Thus perfectly aligning their eyes together.

The youth in front of Rushella stared at her unhappily, with one hand holding down his wound.

"It hurts, it really hurts... what are you doing suddenly? Sucking nonstop... I must have lost at least 500 mililiters... It would have been troublesome if it was someone else."

He has both a worrying and a bitter look, and starts to limp away.

Rushella stares at him blankly as he appeared to resist her, but she immediately recovers, dashes forward with inhuman speed, and grabs his shoulder.

"You, you... who do you think I am!? Such impertinent words toward me...!"

"A vampire, right? Haven't met one in a while... you should be more careful; in such chaotic times, chasing and catching any prey you meet, you could easily get exterminated."

"Insignificant human rubbish! Also, you already received my <<kiss>>, you are now my servant."

Before she even finished, Rushella notices his condition.

His neck already uncovered by the hand, has no bite mark.

But... everything vanished.

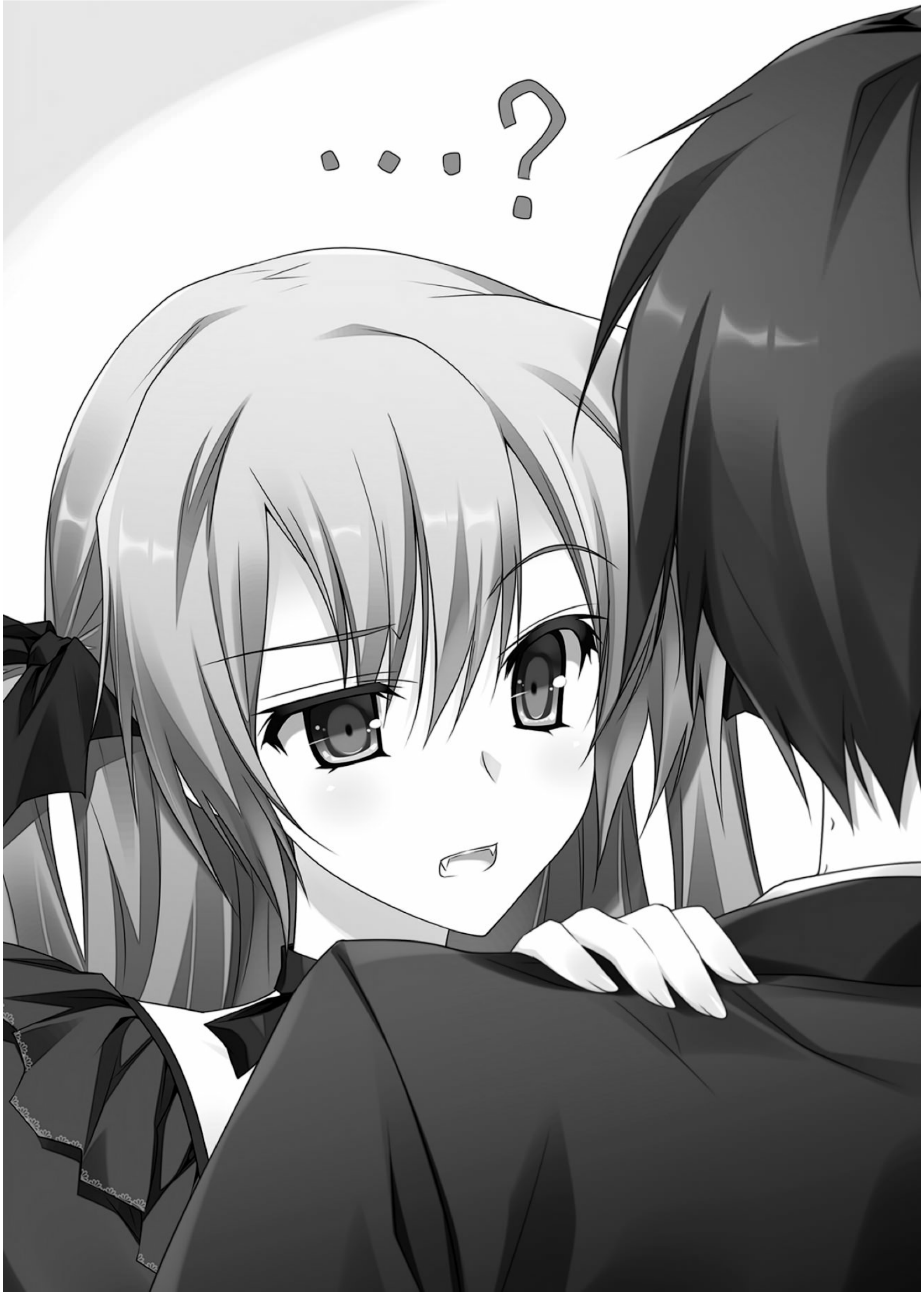
Indeed, the mark engraved on his neck - kiss - or the twin holes known as "baptism", had completely vanished.

"Impossible!"

What was in front of her eyes was impossible to believe, Rushella shakes her head, replying blankly.

Vampire characteristic #1: "Someone bitten by a vampire, will also become a vampire."

However, a complete transformation requires numerous blood sucking and during the transformation, the victim’s body will have an unremovable bite mark.



But... But this boy's body is completely unmarked.

"Why...? I definitely bit you... and drank your blood."

"Haha, that is useless against me."

"Why?! What kind of measures did you use?"

"It is just a physical trait of my body. No matter how much blood you drink, I will never become a vampire."

Lazily explaining such a shocking event, the boy takes another step ahead.

Rushella follows him, as this is impossible for her to accept.

Vampire characteristic #1 amendment: "After having blood sucked, there is no way for a human to escape the fate of a vampire; the only cure is to obliterate the vampire who did the deed before the transformation is finished."

There shouldn't be another way.

"What kind of person are you?"

Facing the question, the youth turned around, replying half-heartily

"Kujou Hisui".

Chapter 1 - Iscariot

Ouch.

This kiss, that came with blood, tainted Kujou Hisui's first day of high school with red.

Right after the opening ceremony, he was suddenly bitten by a vampire on the way home.

Perhaps other students were going to celebrate with their parents, maybe even going out for a feast, to commemorate this special day. But for Hisui, who was living alone, it wasn't possible to have a party like that.

While he was leisurely walking home, the sky was already dark.

With the cool night breeze blowing on his face, Hisui walked into a park near home.

The lush foliage and trees blocked out the light from the street lamps, so the entire area was extremely dark, even during the day. It was even darker at night, so dim that one couldn't even see his own fingers in front of him.

But why did he choose such a route? ...Even Hisui himself couldn't understand.

If he had to justify it, it would be the scent he smelled.

When he got through the park, he smelled what appeared to be the noble aroma of a rose.

He was drawn in by the scent, and by the time his head cleared, he found himself on a lane that he normally wouldn't be on.

The result of this was a complete disaster.

A vampire from the myths had suddenly appeared in the flesh in front of him. However, before he could even resist, he was bitten.

No, stepping back a bit, being bitten isn't such a big deal.

Although it felt more or less awful to have so much blood drained from him, his life was far from being endangered.

If he was your average person, he would be confronted with the dilemma of bidding farewell to his humanity right before the touch of death. But to Hisui, it was not an issue to be concerned with.

There was the possibility of death from blood loss, but no matter how much blood was lost, he won't become a vampire.

In other words, the issue he was confronted with was about...

“What on earth is going on? Is this some kind of magic? Or a cheap little trick? Answer me, human!”

He was entangled with this stubborn vampire girl.

After she finished drinking his blood, she kept following and yelling incessantly at him from behind.

“It is night time, so could you be a bit more quiet?”

“I am more lively at night!”

“I see, you're a vampire after all...”

Vampire's Special Characteristic #2 - They become active after sunset and retreat at dawn. Due to this characteristic they were called the kings of the night, but to night owls like Hisui it was extremely annoying.

“Why did nothing happen after I bit you? After being bitten you should become my servant and follow my orders!”

“I don't want to.” Hisui categorically rejected her.

“Impossible... to think that you wouldn't follow my orders!? Even though I definitely sucked your blood!”

Truly, to a vampire, for this kind of impossible thing to happen, it was as if the world has toppled over.

Whether it's saints, nobles or murderous thugs, as long as they are born human, being bitten by vampires will trigger the transformation.

Also the people who are bitten, would have their minds dominated by the vampire, where their only consideration was for the master's welfare....but Hisui does not even appear to pay attention.

“What kind of person are you?! What kind of magic is this!?”

“I have no idea, this is not a skill, it is a physical trait, phy-si-cal.”

I have answered your questions several times already, an angry Hisui replies in an unfriendly tone.

“How could such a situation exist? Also, I am a vampire, you are meeting a lady like myself! Thus, you should be like... that right??”

“I am afraid. You are wearing this 'I am a vampire' outfit, I didn't expect I would be targeted by you.”

“Didn't think you were an expert. From the way you talk, this is not the first time you met a vampire?”

“.....Ah, I used to know a vampire, that's it.”

Hisui didn't speak anymore, and only kept on walking silently.

Rushella also realized asking such questions would be futile, thus she remained silent for a few minutes before bringing up a different question.

“Alright, I will recognize the fact that you have an absurd body. And I don't care about those run-of-the-mill vampires; you cannot escape the fangs of a True Ancestor. Confess, what trick are you using?”

Hisui suddenly stops.

Rushella suddenly brings up a certain description that he cannot ignore.

“True Ancestor? Are you joking?”

“Of course not? I am at the apex of the vampire race, carrying the blood of the founder, the mighty True Ancestor!”

As Rushella proudly replies, her full chest puffs up, and Hisui couldn't help but lower his sight.

“In a society like today, something like a True Ancestor is rarer than endangered species. Where are you from? Some place far in the mountains?”

“The way you speak is so impertinent...”

When she replied, Hisui began to sense danger, and suddenly became more alert.

The opponent is a vampire. In this pitch-dark night.

Other than his body, he does not have any special abilities, so there is no way to struggle or win.

And the vampire girl has a pair of short swords attached to each of her legs. Each of her snow-white legs has a sheath bound to her fishnet hose, releasing a dangerous aura.

Against that, the only equipment he has is a high school book-bag.

Naturally, there was nothing in that bag that can be used against a vampire.

Recognizing his own disadvantage, Hisui's face darkens with fear. But Rushella answers him with an enchanting smile.

“Don't worry, I won't use any violence that would harm your body. I just want you to voluntarily offer me your neck.”

Rushella squints her black pupils, changing their shape into something resembling that of a cat's.

Then her eyes--released a beam of scarlet light.

As his gaze met her's, he understood what Rushella is trying to do.

Vampire's Special Characteristic #3 - Mystic Eyes.

People who are weak willed would be enchanted by those scarlet pupils, and their spirit forever trapped in the darkness.

“Although this was not my original idea, but it is more noble than hunting you down. Not to mention that a stubborn person, a person like you, cannot possibly escape my eyes' binding. Kneel before me, and offer me your neck!”

“Ah, Mystic Eyes don't work on me either...”

Hisui scratched his head, and replied slowly.

Based on what he is saying, his eyes were not dazzled by the Mystic Eyes.

Rushella's jaw drops and she stares at him blankly.

Looking at her, Hisui couldn't help but feel sorry, and lowered his gaze.

“So... I'm sorry?”

“....Don't be sorry! This is making me even more mad, why is this? Why are my Mystic Eyes not working?”

“That can also be said to be a physical attribute. You know I would not transform into a vampire, and didn't expect this? Pretty much all vampire abilities don't work on me.”

“No...impossible...”

Rushella's body collapses on to the ground in shock.

Some insignificant human, against whom a vampire's bite and Mystic Eyes appear to be useless.

It appears that her very existence as a vampire is in doubt.

“I am actually defeated by a human?”

Looking at the depressed Rushella, Hisui realizes this is his chance to escape.

Unfortunately, Rushella recovers quickly.

“No...this is impossible. Something must have went wrong. Maybe I haven't practiced enough!”

“What? Using Mystic Eyes should be a second nature to vampires, right? Especially for a True Ancestor, who should have been using this for years right?”

Facing Hisui's analysis, Rushella looks away.

As if she is trying to avoid the other person's question, her eyes falls upon a nearby feral cat.

“Let's go test it on a nearby prey”

Rushella reaches out her hand to catch the cat.

This black cat appears to be a bit chubby, but it is extremely alert. As soon as Rushella approaches, it dashes away.

But in the end, it is only a cat, and thus, no match for the King of the Night. After a fierce struggle, Rushella catches the wild feline, and holds it up by her hands.

“Making me waste my time...hey, look at me!”

But the cat instantly looks away.

Rushella could only use her hand to turn its head toward her, and the scarlet light from her eyes met the cat.

Although she didn't need to use her Mystic Eyes, the wild cat becomes relaxed.

“Shouldn't you quickly greet your master?”

Listening to these words, the cat's attitude does a 180 degree turn, it begins to meow cutely and lick her hand.

“Very good...isn't it effective? It looks like I am not having a problem. Ok, one more time! Human, look at my eyes again!”

She turned around, but there was noone in sight.

Only the night wind blowing across an empty park.

Rushella opens her mouth, speechless.

Only a few seconds later, she realizes that she had been ditched.

“That human...”

“ESCAPED!”

Sighing at the night sky, he finally arrives home.

Hisui's home is a western styled two stories house, extremely large for someone living alone. The house's white walls have turned dark and grey due to age and weather, giving it an ancient look. Thus, is understandable for the neighboring children to claim the place to be haunted.

If this house belonged to someone else, Hisui himself would definitely not visit it or even step within the neighborhood. But this is after all his own home. Even though the night stroll was not peaceful, in any case, let me take a shower first.

After washing his body, Hisui contently dips into the tub, but he still could not stop thinking about that strange girl.

“Vampire, huh? I haven't met one in a long time.”

He murmured while smiling bitterly.

Who would have thought in this era, you could still meet that kind of --one should say, archetypical or perhaps old-fashioned... in any case, a vampire who so utterly embodied the style of a classic vampire.

He thought he would never meet someone like this again... nor does he want to meet one.

He definitely does not want to have to deal with a vampire again.

Hisui unconsciously reaches out to his chest, which is throbbing a little painfully. A line ran down his chest. This scar blemished his otherwise pale chest, making Hisui frown.

“Couldn't pick anyone else, has to come suck my blood...”

Hisui felt a bit sorry for her. From her look of hunger, she must have been thirsty for a long time. But that was definitely not his fault.

If it is a normal person, they will transform into a vampire after being bitten, or be ensnared by the Mystic Eyes. Of course, for a normal person, the first feeling when meeting a vampire would be pure terror.

But Hisui is unique in this aspect.

From vampire related knowledge and personal meeting experience--the most important part of this is his physique.

Not transforming into a vampire after being bitten and the ability to cancel out special powers was due to this special physique, thus he has no fear of vampires.

However, he can still die from something classic like violence, or massive blood loss like a normal person.

Even so his wounds would close rapidly, and his speed of regenerating blood is borderline superhuman. Other than that, he was no different than the average boy.

Furthermore, this specialty, he doesn't even realize it himself.

Unless he runs into a vampire, he mostly doesn't feel how these traits could be advantageous.

But now, his blood red troubles are over.

Only that girl's features in the dark--the vampire known as Rushella's beauty, is unable to fade from his mind.

“She looked pretty cute...”

Hisui shakes his head, scattering all information related to her from his head and then leaves the shower.

Using a towel to wipe his head, Hisui walks toward the kitchen.

Pulling a milk bottle from the fridge to drink is just perfect, but he suddenly hears a loud banging from the door.

Although there is an intercom on the door, that person kept slamming the door.

A bad feeling washed over him.

An especially bad feeling.

“It can't be her, right?”

Unsettled, Hisui walked toward the entrance hall.

But not only does the banging not stop, it becomes even louder.

“Coming, coming! I heard it, I am coming.”

Hisui puts the towel on his head, then opens the door.

Peering from the door gap, he sees a beautiful girl with her arms crossed in front of his door.

Rushella returned.

And stared at him with piercing eyes.

“Found you, human. Decided to scurry away and escape have you? This time you will become my servant!”

“It is already late, please walk home slowly.” [1]

Hisui then promptly closes the door.

Just when he wishes to forget everything, the pounding on the door becomes even louder. Worrying about the neighbors complaining, the youth could only reluctantly open the door.

“What do you want? And how did you find my house?”

“Even if it does not work on you, my Mystic Eyes can still control animals. So I decided to use them to help me out.”

Rushella hums, and flicks her index finger behind her.

There was a group of wild dogs following behind her awaiting orders.

Dozens of them became her servants, and are kneeling behind the vampire girl.

It appears she decided to use Mystic Eyes to put the hounds under her control, and then used their noses to sniff out Hisui's home.

“Quite impressive...that is an amazing use of your abilities.”

Hisui sighs, but then he notices Rushella's face is rapidly turning red.

“Hmm?”

“Why, why are you looking like this?! Go put on some clothes!”

Hisui then realizes his appearance.

Having just finished his shower, the upper half of his body is naked, and the lower half is only covered by a pair of sleeping-underwear.

While it could be exciting to the opposite sex, being half naked shouldn't be that shocking.

But Rushella's face is turning utterly scarlet.

“Hey, what? Are you shy? You were jumping for my neck earlier, now you see a naked torso and...”

“Stop talking! Put some clothes on!”

“Why don't you complain inside?”

Hisui opens the door, letting her inside.

Although she could cross inside with a single step, Rushella does not enter.

As if she is stopped by an invisible force, unable to step forward no matter how hard she tries.

“In other words...you can't enter....if you don't have my permission.”

Vampire's Special Characteristic #4 - When visiting someone's house for the first time, they must receive permission or else they cannot enter.

Even though this characteristic is absurd, and completely without reason, but it is the truth.

Rushella standing in front of the door and unable to enter is ironclad evidence.

There is no material barrier, but she is held back by her racial trait—in other words, she was being bound by a supernatural force and thus, a proof of being a vampire.

“Don't look down on me, human. Give me the permission quickly, this is for your own good...”

Rushella coldly warns Hisui with a voice full of supernatural potency, but he is the one with the advantage.

“I can't do that. If I give you the permission, wouldn't you be able to enter?”

“So it is like this? Then I have no choice, boys, teach him a lesson!”

Rushella snaps her fingers; the dogs behind her begin to howl like mad.

WOOF WOOF WOOF WOOF WOOF!!!!!!!

The high-tenor dog barks fill the street under the night sky.

Hisui covers his ears, and complains bitterly.

“What are you doing! Neighbors are going to come to me and complain! I am going to get yelled at.”

“Who cares about you. Unto you I say this: don't even think about them stopping until you give me your permission to enter. Don't think your little human intelligence can outfox me!”

After all, Hisui had escaped once, Rushella's attitude became hardened.

Hisui ended up surrendering, sighed, and answered her request.

“Ok, Ok, I understand. But, before I allow you to enter, I need to make some preparations, can you wait a few minutes?”

“Don't even think about locking the door and refusing to come out, otherwise they will bark all night!”

“I understand, it won't take long. I need to put on my clothes, right? It is chilly right now, and your eyes are pretty disturbed, right?”

She definitely appears to be uncomfortable with Hisui half naked; Rushella, who is clearly unhappy still nods her head.

“Please wait a bit.”

Hisui closes the door, then vanishes into the depth of the house.

Rushella waits for an untold number of minutes before the door finally opens. Hisui comes back with a pair of black T-shirt.

“Hum, you have put some clothes on. Now, according to our agreement, let me in!”

“Yes yes, please enter.”

As these words were spoken, the atmosphere changed.

As if a tight rope has been snapped, or as if thin glass has been shattered—Hisui has these images in mind.

“Permission received. Good, now offer me your blood!”

Two eyes blazing with fire, Rushella walks straight through the door.

Looking at Hisui's neck, to taste the delicious red blood again...

“...Eh?”

As she almost reaches the boy's neck, she smells a stench.

Although a vampire's sense of smell is not good as a dog's, it is significantly sharper than humans' and is able to distinguish the source of the odor.

It is a forbidden smell to vampires.

“You, did you?”

Taking advantage of Rushella's shock, Hisui covers her face with the towel in his left hand.

The great king of the night instantly collapses and faints on the floor.

Hisui stares at her with understanding eyes, and holds out a plastic jar in his left hand.

On the label it's marked:

[Specially made Garlic Powder]

Vampire's Weakness #1 - Fear of garlic.

Even though it is an old fact, it is very effective on the fainted Rushella. Pouring the entire can on to the towel was highly effective.

To be safe, Hisui waits for several minutes, then finally lifts the towel from her face.

A beautiful vampire knocked out from a face full of garlic, looking absolutely pitiful.

But still, her dark beauty remains untouched. Beauty is her greatest weapon, something that Hisui already understood.

If her face came close, it would way exceed the killing power of the Mystic Eyes.

“Now...what do I do next?”

The best way to get rid of a vampire would be to drive a stake through her heart, and the next step is to cut off her head, but Hisui doesn't plan to be that extreme.

Because, he is not willing. Even though she is not human, Hisui is still incapable of such bloodlust. Also, she is a girl with a huge bust; to slam a stake through that--is extremely conflicting.

Or Hisui could leave her where she is and she will turn to ash at dawn.

While considering his options, he realizes there is something often associated with a vampire next to Rushella.

It is something to help her to pass the daytime--a coffin.

It is another old vampire item, but something very critical to a vampire. Pure black at the back with elaborate workmanship, it is engraved with well carved runes. The design could be called a work of art. There is a heavy lock on the side, but Rushella did not appear to lock it.

“She even brought her sleeping gear...but this coffin is really old fashioned, what is she about...”

Hisui with a surprised face opens the lid; the internal design is well made, with extremely soft padding in red.

Carefully placing Rushella into the coffin, Hisui closes the lid.

“This ought to do it. You all should leave too.”

Hisui drives away the dogs, due to Rushella fainting, the effect of the Mystic Eyes ended, so Rushella's groupies all leaves.

As his front door clears, Hisui sighs in relief.

“I'm exhausted. Let's sleep first. I will think about things after sleeping.

Finding a good place for Rushella's coffin, the boy yawns, and heads for his room on the second floor.

Dreaming a highly uncomfortable dream.

Possibly due to meeting a vampire, it is a scenario that one wishes not to be in, a memory that is not to be remembered, but unforgettable. Part dream, part conscience.

It is a sun drenched in wilderness.

Hisui finds himself lying on the ground.

The heat sears his skin, sapping moisture and strength.

Like death is not far--as if one foot has already passed through the gate of hell.

His snow white skin, becoming deathly pale, rapidly losing blood color.

Heartbeat already stopping, the source of life's blood flow, also loses its use.

But his conscience still remains. As if he is watching his body from a different angle, this could be considered a dying experience. Trying to command his own body, trying to scream at his own body.

“.....COME! YOU CAN'T...AHHH!!!!”

Her voice sounded exhausted in the background.

Two hands unable to stop squeezing his chest.

To recover a throbbing pulse, to ignite the fire of life.

“It is...enough. It really is...enough, ahhhhh...”

He wanted to tell her that.

Wanted to reach out for her hand.

But he could not do it, his body unable to budge.

Thus, she never stopped. Doing her best to call back his life.

Behind her is the searing sun, with two hands relentlessly pushing into his chest.

“Stop...if you keep doing this, you will...!”

Finally opening his eyes and screaming.

“Ah?”

Hisui finally realizes the dream is over.

His sight returns to his familiar room.

Yup...it was only a dream, a memory of the past.

It is already past...but there is still something heavy on his chest.

As if it is being held down by something.

It has a certain kind of softness, but it's not heavy. It feels like something soft yet bouncy holding him down.

And there is a very high class fragrance flowing into his nose. Maybe this is still a dream.

The alarm clock still had not rung. Lets sleep a little bit more, as Hisui thought. In that instant, there is a sudden sharp pain coming from his neck, and he wakes up.

“OUCH”

There is the sound of being bitten from the left side of his neck.

“IT GODDAMN HURTS!”

Hisui wants to jump up and hold his neck, but the heavy thing on his chest refuses to move.

“You are finally awake.”

“You!”

That is Rushella, lying on his body, penetrating his neck with her fangs.

It is especially important to point out her seductive look.

Clad only in a towel, with water droplets rolling and landing on to his chest.

From the look of her steamy body, it appears she just came out of the shower.

“Why, why...”

“Do you think garlic can stop me? Even though my race hate it, but I am a real True Ancestor, something like that will only work short term on me.”

“So garlic has a reduced effect against high class vampires, so now I recognize you are indeed high level. But why go take a shower? Why do you have to use my bath?”

“Because you gave me permission to enter your home. In other words, everything here is open to my use. Also, you can't blame me, because you are the one who sprayed me full of garlic, even my coffin stinks of it! Finally, hot water is really convenient. I was worried about the effect of the running water, but there seem to be no effect. Humans can be really capable too.”

Looking at Rushella's happy face, Hisui couldn't help but think about vampire's other weakness.

Vampire's Weakness #2 - Running water.

Moving and cleansing water-is a dangerous weakness for vampires.

But apparently it is limited to natural running water, or holy water.

Human made water, containing chlorine and different to natural water, shouldn't have any effects on Rushella.

“Thus, after you happily bathe yourself, you came to suck my blood now?”

“So noisy, shut up. But it appears you are really weak right now. Is it because of that? Despite being a human, do you dislike morning?”

Hisui's resistance is indeed weak. To be honest, keep on holding like this is not bad.

“Indeed, I heard certain kind of people, because of low blood pressure will become like this. Let me look how is your current blood flow. I can feel your blood flow by touch. Normally, with some adjustment and blood consumption will be even easier...strange, how come all the blood went to the bottom half of your body?”

“That is a young man's most sensitive area, please don't play with it...but, it is a morning phenomenon, how should I explain this?”

Hisui couldn't explain it properly, so he turns his face away.

But his line of sight still reaches Rushella.

In other words, it is zoomed towards her chest.

Two extremely ripe fruits pushing onto his chest.

Twin snowy peaks, complimented by her impossibly slim body. A valley that you just lose your sight into...

To be exact, her towel was about to fall off, and her pink spot was about to be revealed...

“LECHEROUS FIEND!!!!”

Rushella's face goes scarlet, she instantly leaves the boy's chest, and repeatedly slaps his face in the process.

His face is loudly slapped left and right.

“What are you doing! You are the one who revealed it to me to look at!

Your completely unreasonable body, elasticity and softness is what is to blame!”

“So, so noisy!”

Her beautiful face again comes close to Hisui, and her fangs clamp down on to his neck.

“HEY! LET GO!”

“This time you will become my property, offer all of your blood to me!”

Let's suck first then talk later—this is Rushella's new strategy toward Hisui's peculiar body.

Definitely will not let him struggle, with no time to savor the flavor, just finish him off in one gulp.

Against a serious Rushella, the boy's face changes color.

The body's blood is rapidly decreasing—if he doesn't do something, in a few seconds it will pass the critical point, or approximately half drained.

“...Move aside.”

The situation is becoming dangerous, so Hisui had to use extreme measures.

Right next to the bed is the window, Hisui rips the curtain aside, flooding the room with sunlight.

“Damn you!”

That fearless Rushella, for first time shows true fright.

She immediately dives away from Hisui, and hides in the corner where the sunlight cannot reach.

Vampire's Weakness #3 - To vampires, after being struck by sunlight, the area struck by sunlight will turn into ash, eventually leading to total destruction. The total time till death depends on the vampire, but it is definitely a fatal weakness.

“You're really afraid of this...”

“You bastard, you dare to use sunlight against me!”

Rushella became so filled with rage her shoulders shook causing her to let go of the towel, that was covering her naked body, which flutters down to the floor.

Hisui wanted to look away, but suddenly, his male urges exceeded his willpower, letting him look.

In the middle of his sight, is the white tinted with red chest, a beautiful and dreamlike tender body.

The most delicious part, is full and soft chest, fleshy colored and cute peaks, looking up; while following the contour of the body and searching downwards, a small patch of grassland....

“STOP LOOKING AHHHHH!!!!”

Something that was placed over there is picked up by Rushella and flung toward Hisui's head, such that that beautiful image vanished in the ensuing concussion.

“You want to kill me?! Hey, not really right!?”

Looking at the object that struck his head, the boy's face turns dead pale.

It is his own beloved alarm clock.

The front side has a fist shaped conclave buried into it, the minute arrows are completely smashed out of place.

“Oh, that? I don't know why it kept screaming non-stop, so I hit it once. Humans invent such odd objects.”

“This is a necessity! It already rang?”

Hisui's pale face looks at his watch by the bedside, and checking for the correct time his face becomes paler.

“This is bad... even if I break off in a full speed run I won't be on time... and I didn't eat last night because I was going to have a full breakfast!”

Hisui murmured to himself, then starts to strip off his clothes.

Although he didn't want any awards, nor does he wish to become an all-star student, but arriving late on the first day of high school is something that would be totally unexplainable.

“Why are you taking your clothes off?! Could...could it be that this insignificant human wants to do me!?”

Rushella grabbed the towel defensively protecting her own body.

Naturally, Hisui could understand her reaction.

“If you don't want to look, then get out of this room, I don't have the time for you anymore.”

Seeing Hisui about to take off his shorts, Rushella could only dash out of the door.

But due to her own curiosity she still wanted to peek, however Hisui rapidly put on his uniform and dashes out the door, thus the peeking was unsuccessful.

“Where are you going!?”

“Going to school. But let me tell you this first. My body will not be affected by blood sucking. Even if all the blood is drained, I will only die from blood loss, I won't become a vampire.”

“Your constitution is so strange... but you are still afraid of death. That is why you panicked earlier.”

“Anyone would. The average person would hate to get his blood sucked.”

“Only this?”

Rushella chases and asks, twin eyes blinking scarlet light at him.

Hisui moves his eyes away, and impatiently warns her: “If you only want to drink blood... it is OK. A little bit more than this is not a big deal. But don't suck past the point of death, this is for your own good as well.”

“Your request is a bit strange. Are you threatening me? You dare to threaten a vampire like me?”

“To make it simple... you should do it safely. If you drink too much then it will be too late.”

Hearing Hisui's serious tone, Rushella didn't say anything. Only silently sent him to school.

“After dusk you should go back to where you live. I will leave the keys here. Lock the door and leave them in the mailbox.”

Rushella, who is left alone, stands there dumbfounded for a quarter of hour or so, and she continues to think about something while placing her finger on her chin, mumbling.

“School, is it...?”

“I am Kujou Hisui from Akanishi Middle School. My interests reading and cooking. I have no special talents. If you discover one please tell me.”

Adding a bit of witty substance to the end, Hisui finishes his self-introduction, before walking to the right of the classroom and taking his seat.

Right now it is the school's orientation, the self-intro part.

Some people would use this opportunity to give a great speech, instantly attracting everyone's attention, but Hisui is not that kind of person.

Being able to maintain some distance, yet adept enough to talk to anyone about anything, nor making any great mistakes, having a peaceful school life is the best.

All he desires is this peaceful lifestyle.

Following Hisui, came a female student.

Although he already gone ahead, he decides to listen, but as this girl is assigned to his left, so he paid a bit of attention.

“I am Sera Reina from Aishin Middle School. My interests are reading and pastry making, my specialties are tracks and athletics. Please take care of me.”

In that instant, her eyes and Hisui's met.

“Please take care of me...”

“Same here.”

Hisui replied to this shy young lady with a faint smile.

Reina, right after the self introduction, she was suddenly named class representative, this girl is a bit unlucky.

In this kind of prestigious high school, the freshman leaders are usually selected by the homeroom teacher.

Especially the class representatives are usually selected from recommended students.

The class selected Reina as well.

This beautiful girl who looks as if she came out of a painting, but does not appear to be arrogant. Rather, she gives the impression that she is easy to approach, an image of someone who's always doing her best for all the students. Should be a natural class rep.

“This class doesn't seem to have anyone else from Aishin Middle School... eh, that is understandable...”

“Aishin, that is a Catholic school right? So it is a school for ladies from elementary and up. Usually they will be admitted to their high school division, of course they wouldn't show up here.”

“Right, this is true... but Kujou-san's middle school is also very rare?”

“... I think I am the only one here that came from there.”

“Really? Then... I guess we are the same.”

Coming to this high school alone formed a common bond, and the two smiled at each other.

Although they have differences—but, on this busy first day, they were able to find a conversational topic.

Hisui was able to breath a sigh of relief, as self-introductions finally drew to a close.

“Ok, then next is the day schedule.” The short and radish faced lady, of an undetermined age, yelled.

She is the teacher who did the self-introduction, Horie Jyuri.

Apparently her subject is world history, thus she also wears a uniform, which makes her look no different than the students. Her body is completely unexpected, but her curled hair compliments her cute face, which makes her popular with the male students. However, she lacks the fear-inspiring presence a teacher should have. Therefore, there is all kinds of chatter occurring around the classroom.

“Okay, this afternoon there is a health examination, after the noon rest, please change into your gym uniform, female students will meet in the gym, males out in the yard.”

Hisui listens, then grumbles that the first day will be tiresome exercise; just then someone knocks from outside the door.

Everyone became inquisitive of who came, Jyuri as a representative opened the door, then walked into the hallway to converse with who had arrived.

“Ah, Hashimoto-sensei, what is going on?”

The person who came was a strong and proper man that appeared on the opening day ceremony.

He was talking to the homeroom teacher regarding something, and the other person kept shaking her head.

“Ah? At this time...? But, I haven't heard of anything...also, yesterday didn't...”

“Ah, there is none, but this is principal’s idea...so, sorry for troubling you.”

The Administrator appeared to be confused as well.

Jyuri-sensei becomes even more mystified, then came back to the podium.

“There is another transfer student, so there is a new friend for everyone.”

“Ah? There is another one?”

“Shouldn't they have come for the opening ceremony?”

“So, they didn't show up yesterday?”

“Ah, but there isn't anyone not on the record.”

This announcement becomes more curious and chaotic, and the entire class begins to discuss and gossip.

Even the teacher herself has suspicions, a face full of confusion.

But, since the person came.

She clapped her hand, indicating everyone to be quiet, and brought in the new student.

“Please come in, um, name… Rushella…-san.”

Hisui slam his face against the desk.

The classroom teacher backs up a few steps, as a beauty in a dress walked into the classroom.

She had come to school not wearing a uniform, but fully clothed in a private outfit.

Her dazzling looks, even attracted the girls, and the boys opened their eyes wide.

“My name is Rushella Dahm Draculea. Kneel before me, commoners!”

Rushella commands with great pride.

With the exception of Hisui, everyone responded with a “Huh?”, while time itself stopped.

“Ah, Rushella-san... ah, rather, using the family name should be Draculea-san... right?”

Ignoring the confused teacher, Rushella begins to carefully scan the entire classroom.

Hisui does not want her to find him, so he lowers his line of sight, hugging the desk to appear to be asleep.

“THAT'S NOT MY BUSINESS I DON'T KNOW THAT VAMPIRE DEFINITELY NOT MY BUSINESS DEFINITELY DON'T KNOW THAT VAMPIRE”

Heavily murmuring his desire to escape, Hisui desperately heads for a world of dreams.

But, Rushella easily finds him, lifts him by the neck and brings him back to reality.

“Found you. Really, causing me to waste a whole bunch of effort...”

“... Why are you here?”

This unending nightmare, the girl in front of him is real.

In that few seconds, Hisui felt like he aged decades. But Rushella beam a smile at him that could captivate any male.

“I have arrived.”

"Is she your girlfriend?!"

Not sure who spit that out, prompting the entire class to rivet their attention on the two.

“What's going on? What are you all looking at?”

To avoid having Rushella cause trouble with the other students, Hisui grabs her hand and leads her to the corner of the classroom.

“... What are you doing? How did you know I was here?”

“I went to a place called 'Administration Office' and asked about where you are. At first they said something like “individual privacy,” or something like 'nothing to do with you', so I stared at them for a bit, and they told me everything.”

“Ah, I reckon you must have used Mystic Eyes.”

“Also, there was a place called 'Principal's Office', I went to meet their head, gave him the order of 'give me your cooperation', then they made me a 'transfer student'.”

“Um, this should be Mystic Eyes too. But you really came to school...”

Because the sun is a great weakness, vampires shouldn't move during the day.

Rushella laughed, happily brought out the parasol she was holding in her left hand.

“Idiot, do you think our race only hides in the dark? Holding this specially made parasol for vampires, I can completely avoid the sun. It also can ward off the rain. For a race that hates rain water as well, this is a real treasure.”

“If I have the strength, I really want to rip your treasure in half this instant...”

“Ah, I brought the keys. Since we are going back together, you can hold them.”

Rushella brought out the keys from the morning.

As a reflex, the boy reaches out, but he instantly realizes the meaning of that action, and begins to furtively look at the classroom.

Everyone was looking at him.

Feeling it is the duty of the class rep, or perhaps because she sits next to him, Reina courageously asked, “Kujou-san, you and her... know each other? In order words, perhaps you... live together?”

“... that isn't a bad development, right?”

He tries to play dumb, but it appears to be futile.

Everyone is now completely focused on him.

BAD BAD BAD BAD BAD BAD, REALLY BAD NOW

“What the hell? That guy knows such an AAA class girl? And they are living together!?”

“Hey hey, this is only high school...”

“She made me all excited, but it seems this flower has a master...”

“The classroom seat is not even warm yet, and something like this happens...”

Facing gossip from the entire class. Hisui begins to sweat, racking his brain for ideas.

Becoming the focus of so many people---is something he seriously does not wish for.

Not making huge mistakes, not to be hated by others, not making enemies, live a normal high school life... he only has this small wish.

“You guys, what the heck are you looking at!? Is it because you are enchanted by my beauty, can't blame you, pitiful humans...”

Rushella would keep on talking, so Hisui reaches out and covers her mouth.

“Mmngh...”

Hisui ignores her, then stammers at the assembled students.

“Sorry, this person... is my relative! She came from far away, always lived in another country, I only met her recently... she received royal education, grew up in another country, a bit... no, it is natural to be a bit strange, everyone please forgive her! She is a transfer student, that, you see, entering from another country requires a great deal of paperwork, very tired, so she had no time to attend the opening ceremony... right?”

Hisui stretching all reason trying to explain, looking at Rushella and begging for her approval.

Of course she does not cooperate, she breaks free, then begins to contradict him.

“What are you rambling on about? I'm a princess, how could I be related to you?”

Before she finishes, Hisui holds out her cheek, and whispers.

“Ok, can you not talk for a bit... please?”

Perhaps from Hisui's pale face, or because of his hollow but forceful look, even a royal princess like Rushella became silent.

Thus, even Rushella unexpectedly nods.

“It is so, my self introduction is over, please continue class!”

“Ah, good...”

The completely speechless teacher, finally remembered her authority as a teacher, claps her hands, and made everyone look at the podium.

“Ok, then, let us continue class. Rushella-san, please sit down, just sit at that empty seat.”

Jyuri points to a seat far away from Hisui, left back corner, but Rushella did not pay attention, instead she walks near to Hisui's seat.

“Then... what?”

She ignores Reina, and looks at the male student with glasses sitting next to Hisui.

“Move aside.”

It was a command impossible to resist.

Only an idiot would follow this order, but Rushella's twin eyes blazed red, the boy gets up and limps towards the empty seat, before finally sitting down.

“What? Sit down quickly, isn't that your seat?”

She cheerfully points at the adjacent seat, commanding Hisui to sit down.

Hisui, feeling hopeless, sits down, then hits his head against the desk.

To an observer, he is among beauties.

In reality, a normal day-destroying vampire is near with her poisonous fangs, which makes him a sacrificial animal on an altar.

All the male students shot envious looks, and most would welcome an exchange of seats with him.

Just right after school opens and his peaceful life is disrupted, it looks like there will be endless trouble.

On the first day while going home he gets attacked by a vampire, now on the first day of classes he has a vampire in the same class and she sits next to him as well.

With his eyes full of tears, Hisui can only stare at the ceiling, holding back the despair within his heart.

Goodbye, my normal and peaceful school life.

Translator's Notes and References

1. This is a traditional Asian way to see off a guest

Chapter 2 - Creature Born Upon the Earth

"Why are you so unhappy?"

Rushella lovingly lowered her head and asked, but Hisui did not reply.

He only stared at the sky, cursing the world's change to abnormality and his own life.

Right now was break time, and the location was the rooftop.

It was a symbol of high school life, with the sweet smell of spring, but Hisui's face was full of confusion.

The nightmarish homeroom class was over, Hisui finally finished the morning class.

Because it was the first day at school, the stuff they taught were the basics, only requiring some light attention and it was over. But Rushella's arrogant performance in front of the teachers had completely devastated Hisui's heart.

Even the precious rest time, due to incessant questioning by Rushella regarding school regulation and policies, left him neither peace nor rest.

Not only a transfer student, but also a complete gorgeous beauty, she was popular with both the girls and the boys. But Rushella completely ignored everyone else, only talking to Hisui, thus creating a dangerous aura among the male student population.

Finally break arrived, but... she still followed over.

"I say... can't you be a bit more merciful... just how deep is your hatred for me?"

"Very deep. I drank your blood and yet you refuse to become my servant, and even sprayed me full of garlic."

"But you struck first, right?! And why do you pretend to be a student? High school life has nothing to do with my body, right?"

Hisui's questions were reasonable suspicions, and Rushella looked away.

"Could it be... you look at these young people as prey?"

Hisui's tone became serious.

Teenagers gathered in a high school, so in certain ways it would be an ideal hunting ground for a vampire.

The common knowledge was that vampires loved the blood of a virgin girl the most -- there should be plenty here.

"Wrong, I am not the type that leaves a prey half full and then runs off with someone else."

"Not even one drop, completely dry? I am not going to feel grateful you know, with that kind of logic."

"Isn't it better than abandoning you half transformed?"

"That is vampire logic only."

Hisui sighed, then leaned against the rail fencing.

After being fanged by a vampire, there were usually only two possibilities --- death, or transformation into a vampire.

Death or servitude, this was all the vampire's choice. In certain rare cases during the process for a person to become a vampire, the master vanished.

In a situation like that, the victim that remained behind would be stuck at [Mid-transformation] for the rest of his/her life.

Due to the [Mid-Transformation] the victim might have acquired certain vampire characteristics --- they might have vampiric instincts and a longer lifespan compared to average humans --- and they would carry the curse for the rest of their lives.

"I will carefully select the partner I drink blood from. If I want him to become my servant then the criteria is even more stringent. And in addition, I will not leave until he becomes my servant. It is a (True Ancestor)'s etiquette from the ancient days."

"Then why did you select me?"

".................."

"Looking at you, who is so serious on making me your servant, why did you target me last night?"

Hisui was still confused about last night.

When they met last night, Rushella really had wanted to turn him into her servant.

But his body had prevented that transformation, so she had even charged into the school.

Thus... why was she so interested in me?

"Don't you feel honored? I became attracted to you. As if I am really attached to you. To look for someone young and handsome, similar in age to me, a boy with a delicious blood flavor to become my servant."

"...Similar age? What are you blabbering about? Aren't you a [True ancestor]-sama? Although you can't tell from looks, a vampire's actual age must be ancient compared to me. Speaking of that, how old are you?"

As Hisui asked, Rushella's expression froze.

It is almost as if she wasn't feeling offended by having someone ask her age... but as if someone asked her something scary.

"What? Isn't longevity something a vampire should be proud of?"

"I... I don't know."

It was so far the lightest whisper that came from Rushella.

It was the voice of a girl of Hisui's age, feeling totally helpless.

"How old I am... I am really not sure."

"Because you lived so long you forget... apparently not. Then, where are you from... hey, where are your relatives and servants? Why don't you ask them...?"

"I don't have... those people."

"Eh? But..."

"Relatives... I should have them, but I can't remember. Servants... I shouldn't have any. Drinking blood... you are my first time."

"Ha ---- ?!"

Completely confusing.

Ok, now Hisui could understand why her blood sucking techniques were so awful, but the mysteries just got deeper.

"But... aren't you a [True Ancestor]? A royal-blooded Ojou-sama, standing on top of thousands of servants?"

"I don't have... memories."

"Eh?..."

"For example, when was I born, where I was born.... I completely don't know. Thus, how old I am... I don't know either."

Rushella held her arms together, withdrawing back.

She looked far away, biting her lips.

"Lost your.... memories?"

"Maybe so... The night I met you, I woke up from the coffin. Near the forest outside the city. But, why I was there, or when I was there.... I completely don't remember. I only know my name, that I am a true ancestor, other than that...."

"Some average day-to-day knowledge is there, but nothing about myself. But that knowledge... is a bit outdated."

Hisui finally understood.

Strange fashion, a vampire "style" that is rare nowadays, idiotic blood drinking technique.

Such a strange existence, because she don't even understand herself.

It looked like Rushella was not lying; besides, there was nothing good to gain by revealing her own weakness to humans. It looked like she really lost all her memories.

"You came to school; does that mean you want to learn about the current era? Is that the idea?"

".... Correct. I want to know how this world is like. But.... humanity has definitely changed a lot. Looking at this world during the daytime, really shocked me. Such huge buildings, so many people... and if I think carefully, people work and play in broad daylight. Although it makes me feel uncomfortable, but it is clear that world power is in the hands of humans. But it is so strange.... forget about the vampires, I don't even feel the spirits of any supernatural beasts. Why is it like this?"

"Because this is the world's situation right now. Most of the people, even if they know vampire exists, will not believe it."

".... It appears so. When I spoke my name this morning, no one gave any reaction. My name has significant history in the vampire lore. Anyone with a tiny understanding of our history should know who I am."

"It looks like you considered that too..... so that is why you said your name so loudly. Just to grasp the situation."

Hisui's opinion of this outdated vampire had improved a little.

Though her common sense stopped hundreds of years ago, her adaptability was definitely not bad.

"What happened to this world? Why did my race vanish? Why don't the humans know I exist!?"

"Even if you ask this... this 15 year old me, I am still learning the basic common knowledge."

"Tell me quickly. Since you are not surprised of my existence, then you are better knowledgeable than general humans."

She saw through him completely, so Hisui can no longer play dumb.

"I only heard a little from my relative[1]; historically, it should be sometime around the industrial revolution? During that period, humanity's knowledge became more and more advanced. Because of this, our World and the Monster's World's [position] became misaligned."

"Please explain in simple words. What is the Industrial Revolution?"

"..... So I need to explain from the beginning, huh. I think you should learn about world history. To put it simply, it is like wireless communication. When there is a wireless broadcasting station, TV shows become possible. But most of the audience cannot receive the signal. They were meant to match up together, humanity and monsters, which is now miss-positioned. Thus they weren't aware of each other. But now and then they will link up, and the two world overlaps. Those who are sensitive to high frequency.... people who are described as spiritually sensitive, are able to receive effects of the other world much more simply."

"I am completely confused.... wireless what?"

"..... Sorry, my mistake."

Hisui thought his explanation was pretty good, but it appeared she wasn't understanding the critical point. The boy shook his head, and rephrased his explanation so this ojou-sama from another world could understand it.

"In other words, monsters didn't cease to exist, but humanity could no longer feel their existence.... something like that. It is almost as if they were separated into their own world. Thus, even vampires wouldn't be able to find other monsters."

"You should have said this earlier, instead of going around and around."

"..... My mistake."

"I understand. But vampires are special. Vampires are different than other monsters; Vampire still exists in this world, they must completely live in the human world. We are corporeal. And it will be troublesome for us if humans don't exist."

"Indeed. It is completely different than specters who have no body and just floats around. Vampire still exist in this world. You could say they are the representatives of the monsters. Thus, humanity is still alert to their existence."

Hisui's eyes darkened with hesitation, which Rushella did not miss.

"What are you saying? Are you saying humanity expelled my race?"

"My meaning is, such people do exist. They understand this world's true appearance, and consider monsters who coexist in the human world to be their enemies. During self introduction --- You said, no one had any reaction to your name? On the other hand, a few may suspect you are a vampire. You should be careful."

"You don't have to worry, I do not plan to hide my identity. Even if humanity banded together against the vampires, it is nothing special."

Rushella puffed up her chest as she replied.

Such an answer completely met Hisui's expectations, he simply shrugged his shoulders.

"First I must find my memories; if I manage to, I should be able to find other vampires. I want to ask them things. You seem to have a great understanding of vampires, so help me."

"Don't want to, you can do it alone."

"But you are a servant that's meant to serve me."

"I am not your servant; I am not familiar with your race's organizational make-ups, nor am I interested."

"You really are the cheeky type."

Rushella's pride appeared to be wounded, she clicked her tongue then moved closer.

It is day time, thus her physical capabilities are reduced, but Rushella will still definitely win if she decided to play hardball.

The boy was still considering his options when Rushella laughed.

"Although beating you is simple, but in certain ways I would have lost. I want you to surrender by your own free will, kneel before me, then I will bury the hatchet."

"(expletive), but vampires are naturally like this. But you have your fangs and <Mystic eyes>, couldn't you subdue anyone easily?"

"Isn't it useless against you!? But in certain ways, it is still effective. For example.... you worry about me looking for other prey, right? Those people have no relationship with you, but you still care about them."

"Of course I care. If someone around me dies, or stops being human... I definitely don't want to see it happen. If it becomes like that, even me.... I would become a vampire hunter."

To protect his peaceful life, even Hisui would become a cold-hearted foe.

Rushella *hum* (sound), then stands up.

"I don't think you could exterminate me. But, let's stop wasting time. You will still come to help me."

"That, I already said..."

"If you agree to help me, I will not suck anyone else's blood. I can promise that with you. If you are willing to sacrifice your body to me, I will guarantee the safety of other people around you. How is that?"

"This sucks..."

This must be the feeling of a man staked on altar meant for human sacrifice.

It was the first day at school, and the fate of everyone here was on his shoulders.

"So? Decide quickly."

"......... I will serve you."

"I can't hear you, speak louder."

Rushella wanted to show off her beautiful ears, moving it next to him.

"Let me help you."

"Did you forget something?"

"Please allow me to help you.... mistress."

"Hum, you speak well!"

It was clear he didn't lose his humanity, but Hisui suddenly reached a level lower than average humans.

"Damn it... I never thought I would curse my own body one day..."

"Then you will work hard right. A servant who can move during daytime is precious to me. And one day you will become one of my kind. Then, let's perform today's service?"

"Ha?"

Hisui looked confused, suddenly his field of vision turned dark, and Rushella's face came close.

In that instant, he found himself on the floor.

What was blocking the sun was Rushella on top of him holding a parasol.

"Then.... Rushella-sama?"

"You went to the 'cafeteria' to buy lunch right? Then I am going to have lunch as well."

Rushella licked her lips, then dove at Hisui's neck.

The boy tried to struggle, to avoid the sweet breathe down his neck.

"Hey, let go! Didn't you suck me this morning?! It should had been enough right?"

"Be quiet, I don't feel well, what is the problem? All I want is to suck a little bit!"

"I said it is not allowed....!"

Rushella's lips came closer and closer, while Hisui struggled.

The two struggled, until Rushella's lips reached his neck.

"Making me waste so much energy..! Ok, I am going to take care of you..!"

"Are you a corrupt bureaucrat who steals people's daughters?"

As Hisui prepared his final line of defense, the rooftop door suddenly opened.

"..... Hisui.... san?"

Hisui recognized the voice, and froze.

There were several people standing by the stairs.

Rushella's lips were still on his neck, while he turned his sight around.

Among the students he barely knew, there was one who had the best relationship with him --- Class Rep Sera Reina.

Judging by the lunch box she was carrying, Reina planned to come to have lunch with Hisui.

"That..... I am sorry for interrupting!"

Hearing Reina's heartfelt apology, Hisui began to sweat uncontrollably.

His own limbs were currently pinned to the ground by Rushella.

It looked like they were about to share a passionate kiss.

Even if he pushed the vampire away, there would still be kiss marks left behind.

"I, I say...!"

Before Hisui could explain, the girls all dispersed.

But their harmless gossip still flow into his ear.

"Hum, they are... really together? They already got it done so early?"

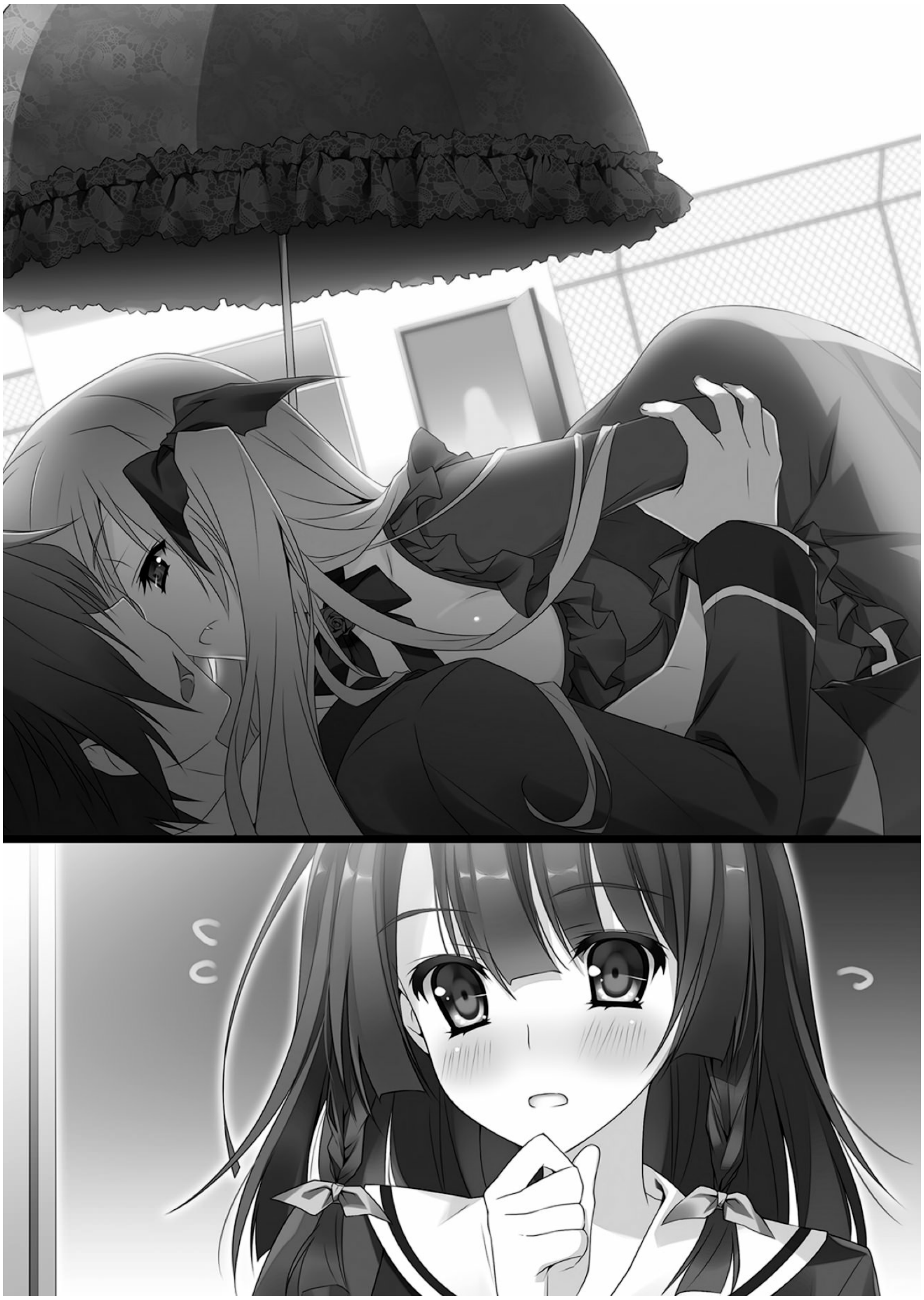
"It looks like they weren't going to just kiss..."

"School just started, and it is broad daylight outside, what the heck..."

"Foreign girls... so open."

Even though it was only whispers, but they felt like a painful roar in Hisui's head.

.... And a stab in the heart.



Hisui stared at the sky soullessly.

Rushella appeared to lose interest as well, brushed up her hair and straightened out her clothes that were messed up by Hisui; she got up from his body.

"Peeking at other people eating lunch, what a bunch of impolite people. Don't you think so?"

"I finally understood what a girl feels like when she is forcefully pushed down...."

Hisui tearfully murmured. His hands became loose, and the plastic bag with the food he brought from the cafeteria fell down.

"Ah yes, what did you buy? Let me look, I want a taste."

"Up to you.... in fact, it would be helpful if you helped me eat it."

Searching through the bag, she finally selected a strawberry milk.

She studied the container back and forth, and after finally understanding how to use it, began to sip its contents.

"What? Such a sweet and pink milk! Perhaps they added blood in it?"

No, the original material was the same thing, no need to mix it... Hisui don't even have the strength to sigh.

Rushella began to suck the milk, and began to release a cute sound. Hisui sat nearby with tearful eyes.

The class's final bit of compassion, was swept away by the wind.

Really did want to go to the afternoon class.

The opposite sex's ability to disseminate gossip was faster than the speed of light.

Just lost the ability to have a normal school life.

Now he had to welcome his "being labelled as strange" high school life.

Hisui was considering a school transfer, while Rushella was blissfully sucking away at the milk.

"This is so sweet! It is only secondary to blood..."

"...... Just kill me."

Hisui replied with a blood-coughing despair, but someone not far away was observing the two.

She was not part of the group of girls earlier, she stood in the shadows behind the roof access door, and focused at Hisui with a laser like intensity.

"Good male, found <3."

"..... Why were you so terrible yesterday? Even if you are hopelessly untalented you shouldn't be this bad!"

"It is only a physical examination, why do I have to go all out?"

After school, in front of the locker-room [2] Rushella was criticizing Hisui's results. His results were mediocre at best.

But Rushella had refused to accept the results, and repeatedly criticized him.

"It looks like you were not serious. You really didn't pay attention, right?"

"Isn't everyone the same? Also, I shouldn't be criticized by someone who didn't participate."

Because Physical Education took place outside the school, Rushella used her mystic eyes to stay indoors.

Even though she was not a teacher, she sat on a chair holding her parasol, while cheering and rooting for Hisui.

To be honest, it was extremely embarrassing. And the men's/women's physical ed was suppose to be separate.

"Why were you looking at my Physical Tests?"

"It is your job to forge your own body so you can protect me. Even though you are strangely unable to become a member of my race, you are able to work under the sun, therefore covering my weakness."

"My principle is not to waste energy, what is so special about physical ed? Just meandering through it will be fine."

"Don't be too proud of yourself; when you were serious earlier, you weren't anything special."

"You really know how to make it hurt, you broke through all of my defensive lines."

"Keep your spirits up. When it is 'class time', you were only half paying attention, right? Why are you so meritless?"

"It is no big deal. At critical moments, the strength in my body will come out."

"Stop spouting nonsense. You are my servant, in the moments when lives are on the line, you should be willing to die for me!"

Rushella showed her "high class" looks again, and Hisui was not going to argue.

He stopped looking at Rushella, and opened his shoe-locker. Reaching his hands in for his shoes, he found a slip of paper.

The message was both mysterious and interesting.

"I will be waiting for you on the first floor of the second building, in the empty classroom."

He thought for a moment, then left the shoe-locker and headed back to the school.

"Wait a second, where are you going?!"

"I have something to do. Why don't you go ahead and go home?"

"Why are you angry? Stop spouting nonsense, you are my escort, take me back to that crude residence."

"You still plan to live at my place...? If you are not satisfied then you can go find a different place, Vampire-sama."

As Hisui complained, Rushella realized she had no argument, and became silent.

Thus Hisui escaped and headed for the empty classroom.

He was still unfamiliar with the structure of the school, so he got lost several times before finally finding the right place.

Hisui opened the door, and it was a mess of chairs and desks.

It looked like the place was unused, because of it being a corner room, there wasn't anyone in sight.

As Hisui stared out the window at the fading sun, he heard a voice from behind.

"Ah, you came."

"..... Looks like it was not a wild goose chase, what do you want?"

Hisui turned around, and it was one of the girls from the classroom.

She looked extremely feminine for a girl of their age. Tea colored hair with ponytails, and he could barely recall her face from the self introduction in the morning.

But he could not remember her name.

"You are..."

"Mei, Sudou Mei."

"Ah, right..."

As Hisui recalled, Mei came closer, no, hugging should be a more accurate description.

With a "growth" rivaling Rushella pressing against his chest, and a button undone, the boy could see her mesmerizing cleavage. Mei also raised her head to look at him.

"Why... are you looking for me?"

Suppressing his male instincts, Hisui pretended to be calm.

"(expletive-in a cute manner).... you really don't understand?"

Sudou answered with a devilish smile.

To be honest, it was sexy as hell.

She sounded like someone who was very experienced, her skirt was also short as hell. And keeping her shirt unbuttoned in a style that would make her #1 in the school.

".... I don't really understand, it is the first day of school, for what reason did you call me out here?"

Hisui heightened his awareness, and began to look around.

There doesn't appear to be anyone around.

"Other than two of us, no one else is around. Who are you looking for?"

"Someone could be lying in wait, ready to mock the fool who naively believed the note, worked up their imagination in excitement, and came here shamelessly... such a possibility cannot be ruled out."

"What? Why are you suddenly saying that? Do you have trust issues? Even if you were caught in the spotlight today, there shouldn't be anyone in the class who would start playing pranks the first day of class, right?"

".... Ok, that is good."

Hisui sighed in relief.

While deep in thought, Mei's excited face came even closer.

".... That is a bit too close?"

"I am intentionally closing in. Hisui-san... you seem little cold... hard for people to get close to. During the self introduction, I felt you were observing everyone."

".... Do you really have the right to say that? What, is that when you started to check me out?"

"Of course, handsome, white skin, must be the best in the freshman class, must be great at cross-dressing?"

"I would be?"

Hisui reached out to touch his own face.

To be honest he really didn't have that feeling. Even though his looks apparently attracted vampires, but that isn't something to be happy about.

"Handsome boy... no one around you ever told you that?"

"The one who raised me kept telling me I 'look like a girl' and 'don't be a sissy.'"

Hisui mumbled to himself, but Mei became even more interested, and brought her face even closer.

The two of them were so close to each other, they could feel each other's breath and their lips were almost touching.

"I say..."

"If you don't realize how attractive you are, then I am telling you now."

The devil in front of him smiled.

Hisui could not stop his breathing, and kept on shaking his head.

"You should stop playing, and go look for someone else."

"Ahh, so serious? High school life... wanting a handsome boyfriend to pass the day together... is very normal right?"

"This morning was self-intro. Isn't it too strange? It isn't love at first sight.... all I have to do is to be handsome?"

"Do you want to learn about the other person first? No problem, I will tell you."

Mei reached out and entwined her arms around Hisui's neck.

She closed in on his lips.

"You have something with that child named Rushella right? The rumors among girls are scary."

"No, I don't have anything with her!"

He used this opportunity to come clean, but Sudou was still suspicious.

"Really~? She is so cute, and she has a great body."

"Absolutely horrible personality."

Also not human.... but he couldn't say that point out loud. Looking at Hisui's straight face, Sudou began to believe him.

So she began to pursue in earnest.

"Then it wouldn't be a problem if I became your girlfriend. Let me become your girlfriend."

Her lips were even closer now.

As they were about to touch, Hisui finally freed himself from her grasp.

"What are you doing?"

"This should be my line. Stop making these kinds of jokes. These kinds of things.... is very strange right?!"

Hisui had no ill feeling, but this line made Sudou frown deeply.

"Strange... you mean me?"

"Of course. I don't really hate the fact you are praising me, and I feel the way you are doing it is really cute, but suddenly being called out by you, enticing me, and confessing.... no matter how you think about it, it is strange. The fact it is not shocking should be what is surprising...."

Hisui's voice trailed off suddenly.

Mei bit down her lips, and grabbed a corner of a desk.

CRACK! A piece of the desk broke apart.

It is clear that she didn't exert any strength - it was as if she was just snapping a small tree branch.

Then her delicate fingers wrapped around the broken piece --- and crushed it into powder.

No matter how you looked at it, it was definitely not the strength of a normal high school student.

Suddenly being called out to receive a confession -- and then there was her supernatural strength.

Strange. Everything appeared to be strange.

Hisui eyed the young girl in front of him.

"WHERE AM I STRANGE! WHERE ARE YOU NOT SATISFIED!?"

Mei's face burst into rage and her teeth began to grind against each other.

Kujou became scared, and took a step back.

"No, I am not saying I am not satisfied..."

"Why can't you do it with me?!!! It is clear you did it with a vampire!?"

"YOU...!"

Mei lost her voice, then held her mouth shut.

But it was too late, as the boy began to question her instead.

"Did you find out during the self-introduction...! Did you just call me out to confirm?"

"No, absolutely not..."

With her position reversed, Mei took a step back.

Kujou took a step forward, but accidentally tripped her.

"AHHHH...."

"Be careful!"

Hisui reflexively tried to catch her, but it was too late.

As Mei collapsed, she also dragged him down.

PING! The boy's jaw hit the floor, and stars exploded across his eyes.

His sight turned dark, but Hisui recovered quickly.

"Hurts..."

"Eh?"

Even though his eyes were open, everywhere was still dark.

And there was a warm and soft feeling brushing against his face.

Stunned, he realized what he was looking at.

In front of his eyes was a triangular piece of cloth.

It was extremely high class for a freshman student, and also made of high quality material.

That is... the legendary sexy underwear.

The most important part were covered, so Kujou could not see it, but that defense was fleeting at best.

(...............!!)

The young man finally understood the situation.

He was under the skirt.

He knew it is already too late, but he still tried to look away as a gentleman, looking left and right, but there were only the sizzling legs.

"Eh....?"

Scribbled across the peachy skin was a series of black letters.

They were different than tattoos, as if they were transcribed under the skin.

Kujou froze for a moment, as those words -- or rather legs, finally moved out of his line of sight. At the same time, light poured from above, and his ability to appreciate otome garden had ended.

"Ahhh..."

Mei already stood up. It looked like she was not injured in the fall.

The atmosphere became more awkward by the second. Although this was an accident, but Hisui couldn't stammer an explanation.

He prepared himself for an impending slapping, but Mei only whispered.

"..... saw it?"

The boy obviously was treated to eye candy.

Unable to deny, he could only look away, looking for a way out of this.

"Ah, that, it is a bit exciting."

His heart leaping in terror as he stared at Mei, the other person who locked her legs tightly together, with her hands fiercely holding her skirt down, looking extremely embarrassed, thus completely different than before.

Faced with her natural reaction, Hisui naturally made no excuses and could only confess.

"Sorry, it was not intentional. If you want to slap.... me, I will accept it."

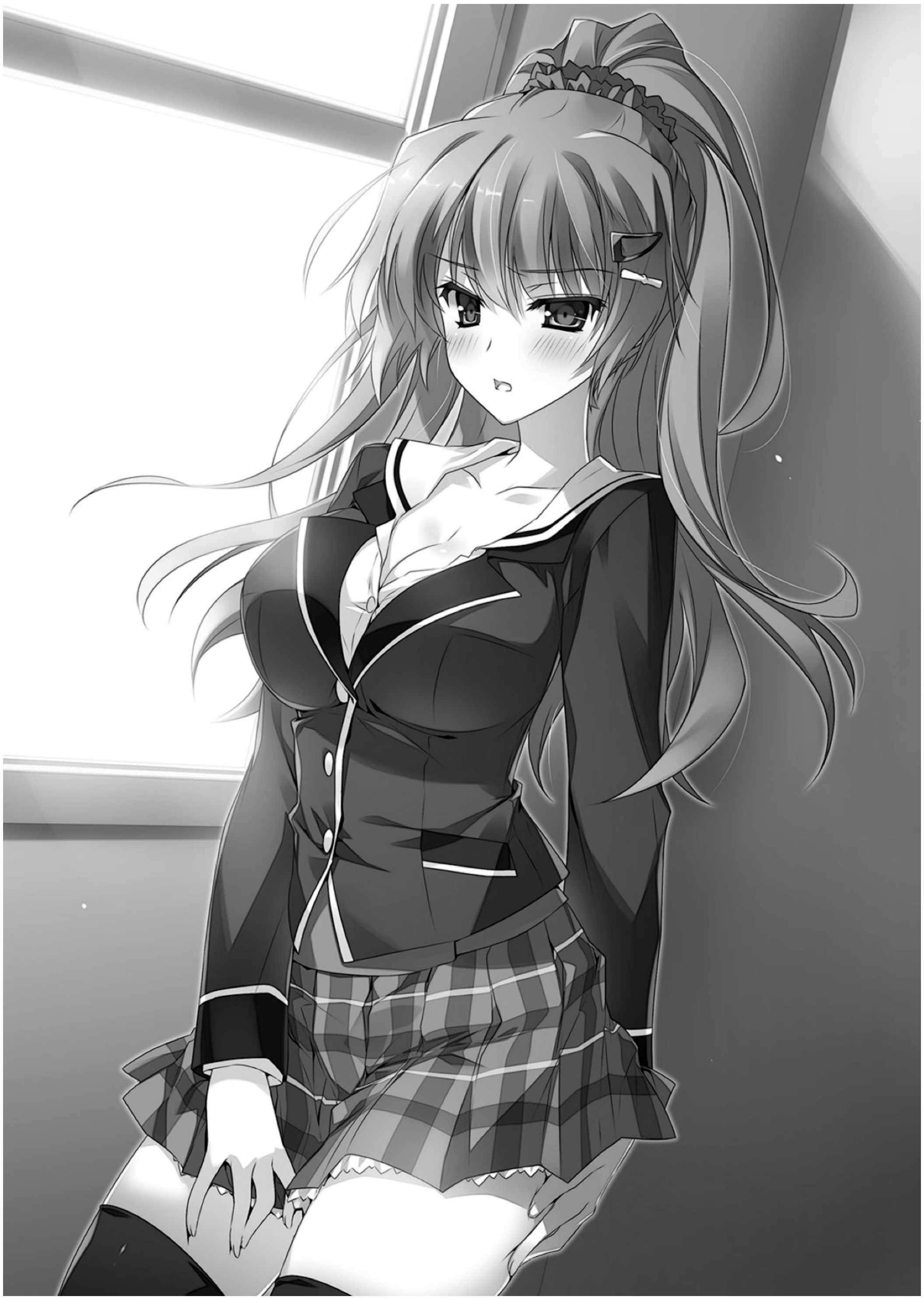
"Did you see.... that?"

She repeated it again.

Hisui tilted his head in confusion.

It was clear he would see it in a situation like that earlier.

But, Mei was using one hand to hold her skirt, another to cover her right leg, thus the boy finally understood what she meant.



She was not asking about her panties.... but that line of writings.

"Ah, I saw it, huh..."

"That is... tattoo? You shouldn't mark your beautiful skin like that. A tattoo should be cute right? That kind of English letters and numbers..."

While speaking, Kujou recalled the words in question.

FC-XX07-a machine like sequence.

"Perhaps this is not a pursuit of fashion, but a cypher? Or a Machine Serial?"

Although it was only a joke, the girl's face twitched.

She replied with a complex expression.

"Exciting... will come naturally. In other words, if you don't want this you will curb your interest naturally. Thus speaking.... hateful, something inhuman."

"By getting excited... it will naturally show itself. In other words... to not let it show I must hold back my feelings. Even like this... it's still disagreeable. This inhuman like thing..."

"You're..."

Kujou's brain started working.

There was a extremely beautiful girl in front of him.

But something was different, there was something wrong.

She recognized Rushella's true nature, there was a strange engraving on her leg, combine the two, one can feel something unnatural.

"What are you? Are you human?"

"...So impertinent, of course I am human, a normal human."

"You are wrong, you are not a normal person."

Hisui coldly deduced.

Mei stared back with furious rage, close to murderous intent.

"Looks like calling you inhuman leads to rage, so you are really not human. What are you?"

".........."

"You are not afraid of sunlight, so you are not a vampire. But no matter what your strength way exceeds that of a high school girl. I said serial number, did I guess correctly? Are you an android?"

"So impolite. Who is an android? I am a human!... just not from a mother's womb."

Mei let go of her rage, and spoke quickly.

"Then how were you created? Cloned? Or artificially made? We are not in a sci-fi novel... there hasn't been a live example yet, right?"

"There is a live example. After 11 months in a laboratory..."

"Ha?"

Kujou frowned, following Mei's words, and suddenly the cover of a famous novel appeared in his mind.

He read a faithful translation of the book once -- and began to recall the content slowly.

"I guess there is no point hiding it. You are a sharp individual, and you did it with a vampire already, I thought you would see through me as well, and that is why I want to win you over. But that vampire never hid the fact who she is, right? And carrying a parasol, anyone who understands vampire lore will know exactly who she is."

It look like she gave up winning over Kujou, so she began to speak out everything in her mind.

"Hum, Hi-kun, have you ever heard of [Frankenstein's tale]?"

"Um. I read it before, and I still can recall some of the details."

It was a world famous sad story.

The young genius Victor Frankenstein discovered the secret of creation, and to prove his theory he created the first artificial human.

However, the plan was supposed to give birth to a beautiful being, but instead it created a monstrous abomination.

That was Frankenstein's monster.

It, along with the vampire, are synonymous with monsters.

According to Kujou's knowledge, like vampires, they exist hidden within human society, rare species of "monsters".

"The original is famous, I heard it was a science-fiction novel. Does that mean that you are..."

"Correct, that crazy genius, Victor Frankenstein's monster --- You could say I am the latest model. And that mark, like you said, is a serial number. Of course I hate it."

Mei stared at the marking on her right leg as if it was some kind of hideous scar.

No matter how similar she was to a human, only that part allowed people to recognize she was artificial.

"According to the story, that monster didn't have any progeny."

Kujou started to recall the content of the novel, and told that to Mei.

That creator, Victor was so different to the creature, experienced so many events together, finally came to the creator and asked him to create a companion for him -- but the creator refused.

This lit a fuse between the father and son, mutually hating each other, which resulted in a cycle of vengeance leading to their destruction.

"It is true, the original prototype died alone. And Victor still hasn´t released the secret of creation. But, he did not destroy his notes, so there have been fragments of them left behind. Geniuses who inherited his madness, with their continued research, finally gave birth to us."

With severe disgust, Mei explained the truth behind the literary masterpiece.

Like the original, ugly creature who hated its scientist creator, Mei also seemed to harbor complicated feelings towards the mad genius.

"But, now Hi-kun found out I am not human, what are you going to do?"

Mei brought her arms together, staring at the boy.

Based on Kujou's answer - the empty classroom could become a bloody battlefield - But Kujou replied calmly.

"I don't mind, I don't have any interest regarding Frankenstein."

"Re...really?"

Mei was a little disappointed. It was clear that his observation skills were hideously sharp, but his willpower to act was zero.

"So what you are saying is, you are not going to publicize Rushella's identity? Although no one would believe it, but something like this would cause waves."

"........."

"Say, are you really an android? shouldn't you have screws on your temple?"

"What era is that? And it only happens in movies right? Although the original was a monster, but I look real, right?"

To prove her authenticity, Mei grabbed Kujou's hands and put it against her face.

Kujou's heart leaped, but his hands transmitted from her a soft feeling, and instantly shattered any preconceived notions about her.

"This is really good, soft, flawless, there are no stitches, it really is a... great face."

"Right?"

Sudou smiled, then dragged his hand on to her chest.

Because the movement was so natural, Kujou also enjoyed her chest's softness.

"Really...... this soft yet elastic, subtle feeling............ Wa——!!"

Regaining his senses, Hisui hastily retracted his hand from her bosom, but it was already too late.

Mei triumphantly glared at Hisui as if she was the victor.

"What are you doing, though it was me who pulled your hand, but isn't it you yourself who rubbed it?"

"...... Much appreciation."

Hisui diffidently moved his gaze away, his hand still retaining the shape when he was touching the breasts, he repeatedly recalled the sensation, anyhow he didn't feel like touching any other objects.

Speaking of the truth he really wants to touch it once more.

"Do you understand now? At present there is no difference between us and a normal human. Besides, the original possessed intellect and feelings, the only difference is the outer appearance."

"Isn’t it better that there is no model number? Why do they need to be deliberately engraved on the skin?"

"That sounds...... admonishing. The original, didn't possess any self-restraint, so it killed people. To not walk in the same path to ruin, we exercise restriction onto ourselves. If we don't want that kind of uncouth scene to happen, we must retain our rationality."

"I see. I completely understand. Bye."

Finishing his speech, Hisui tried to leave.

But Mei took hold of his arm, refusing to let him go.

"...... What? No problems, I won't tell the others."

"Really? You don't feel that I am... a monster."

"What same? Didn't you just stated that you are the same as human? I also feel the same. Compare to those girls walking on the street you are much better. Plus you are cute."

Hisui expressed his opinion, causing Mei to can't help but blush.

"Do you... feel that way?"

"Yeah."

"... Really really?"

"Why would I lie to you? Release me already. If you have anything left to say then say it."

"That... it is ok now. This is a different matter —— like what I had said in the beginning, about being your female partner."

"That, you are being way too blunt... so, is this some sort of love affair?"

"This, of course. After all this is our clan's long cherished wish. In case we are in love with humans, wouldn't that make us artificial humans a true human?"

"So it is like this... indeed, putting it like that then there is no way to distinguish from humans. However, a normal romantic relationship won't do... speaking of which Sudou, there must be more than this......."

"No, putting it in a proper way, romantic relationship is not the final objective, it is just the intermediate pathway? A process in between."

Hearing her weird explanation, Hisui showed a dumbfounded expression.

Although Hisui had no interest in either the artificial humans or their creation, but he was curious about Mei's objective which she painstakingly went through a great deal of troubles to enter high school for.

"Then what's your objective?"

Mei giggled for a moment and replied.

"Making babies❤."

Eh?

Before he even understood what happened it was already too late.

He had been pushed down, his body was lying on the cold floor.

Raising his head up, Mei was currently mounted on top of him.

"E-eh... Sudou-san?"

"What — is it?"

Her chest weighed down.

Crap.

Lunch break is almost over, if this goes on —— it would be bad in a lot of ways.

"W-what do you think you are doing......!?"

"Didn't I say it already, MA·KING·BA·BIES. As a testimony to our lover relationship. Like what Victor Frankenstein had in his mind at first, artificial humans originally possess the ability to reproduce. But it would be meaningless if it isn't with a human wouldn't it? If we are to become [human], it is necessary to do it with a human. This is my objective, the sole reason for my existence. Thus said............"

"Thus said my arse!! Find another person, another person!!"

"What's the problem, you don't need to take responsibility for this❤."

"This is totally not a romantic relationship!! Let me point this out... you are far away from being a human!! Aside from your appearance, the rest are completely off the mark!!"

"How troublesome... I have no intention of listening to your thoughts on this."

Hisui was struggling trying to think of a way to get out of this mess.

Mei continued to push him down.

Generally speaking the situation here had been reversed, the pitiful Hisui was being restrained by a girl’s slender hand, not budging in the slightest.

“So humiliating… why do you have this much strength……!?”

“That’s rude of you. It’s because of the original’s brutality that I, the latest model have a limitation put on. Basically half of the original’s strength.”

“Who in the world would want to know that kind of trivial knowledge, release me!!”

“Nope.”

“You……!”

Even if he used force to fight back, he definitely could not win. Compared to Rushella, her strength was greater in daytime.

On the verge of losing something precious, Hisui gave up on his dignity. Since he could not compete in strength, then the only option left is to call for help.

Hisui opened up his mouth, Mei who perceived his intention, quickly took action.

Yet she did not cover up Hisui’s mouth, rather than that she glared at

Hisui.

Momentary, out came a flash from her pair of glamorous eyes.

This really isn't something superstitious, rather than that it is real, a flash of physical light, manifested out from her eyes.

The light then condensed into a beam, travelling past Hisui's face, and penetrated the area of floor board at his right.

Due to the dazzling light Hisui was taken aback, afterwards he turned to look to his right side.

Two holes were beautifully carved out onto the floor, white smoke continually rising from it.

"Eh——————!?"

"Be at ease. I will guide you through❤."

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaait, didn't you just shoot out a laser beam? From your fucking eyes!? This already deviates much from the original, isn't that a weapon equipped in the military!?”

“Because our strength is suppressed, the excess energy output from the internal combustion is used to supply the weapon instead. Were its to be used with maximum power, a certain amount of time would need to pass before it could be employed again, but if it is the standard setting then you can fire it successively❤”

“Who would want to hear your damn explanation! What is this situation of a high school girl with overrated body’s functions!? You want to be a human, you are completely the polar opposite of that!!”

“You are so annoying ~~ do you want me to turn you into ash?”

Mei once again locked her sight onto Hisui.

Owing to the sheer brute strength and the destructive pair of eyes, this caused Hisui to shut his mouth.

Were he to resist, death will be his final destination.

However, it would also turn bad if he does not resist.

“C-Calm down, I got something to say...... put down your weapon, keep your distance. It is good that our relationship hasn't become worse............!”

“Why do you act like a dispirited lover? Don’t move............!”

Mei used her slender fingers to untie Hisui’s necktie, then his shirt buttons. Gently caressing the bare white chest.

Hisui thought of struggling free though it was impossible at present.

The caressing appeared to be a very light touch, soothing the mind, Mei’s finger brushed back and forth on the smooth skin, resembling a melody.

“How, come, this…………? Can't muster, any strength…………”

“Ah…… your expression is really cute. Seems like I am right on the mark. Let me tell you this first, my standards are pretty high. It’s love at first sight, you should be honored.”

“Who, would, want to…………”

Hisui denied with a feeble voice, gasping for breath.

His whole body had gone limp, and some unknown substances was creeping up from inside his stomach.

"What the fuck, this… What did you do to me…!?"

"I said it before… I'm the latest model. In order to successfully make babies with the target, I'm equipped with ten thousand different pleasure functions. A perfect blowup doll❤"

"Blowup doll… Isn't that term the most insulting for artificial humans!"

"In any case, you refuse to back down? Fine, prepare yourself..."

Mei licked her lips and untied her ponytail.

Her hair draped down onto Hisui's face, giving off a seductive fragrance.

Even her body's scent and breath was probably part of her pleasure functions, right? Hisui felt even more powerless, even mentally he was gradually losing resistance.

"S-Stop..."

"You looked so flippant yet you're surprisingly rational. But... you're at your limit, eh?"

Mei slid her tongue into Hisui's ear, using her fingertips to tickle Hisui's chest.

Her other hand was caressing Hisui all over, finally reaching between his legs. Then her lips approached Hisui.

No good.

This is really no good.

"Let us build a bridge between two races❤"

"..."

Hisui couldn't even muster up verbal resistance.

The approaching lips and the finger reaching down below.

Farewell, my precious whatever.

Although he was not crying, somehow an image of a painted canvas appeared before his eyes.

"Hands off! What are you doing!?"

Suddenly, a loud voice demanded. Mei suddenly got up and separated from Hisui.

"Who is this...!?"

Mei looked at the speaker to find Rushella standing there with arms crossed.

"This is a place of learning, right!? Here, doing that kind of...! Who allowed you to make a move on my servant!?"

Rushella pointed to Mei and asked. From the way her face looked, she was going to rush over and grab Mei any moment.

Mei simply tossed her hair lightly and replied with composure.

"Hands off? Is there a problem with a mere handjob?"

"Stop it with those dirty puns, okay..."

Hisui got up and did not forget to retort.

Stumbling, he distanced himself from Mei and leaned back on a wall to avoid getting pushed down again.

"Oh my, you're so cold. Clearly just now, you were so happy from my touch."

"I am really feeling disgusted with myself..."

Hisui spoke bitterly, thankful for Rushella's existence for the first time.

But this savior had no self-awareness and pointed her hostility towards Hisui.

"You're my servant, you know, why did you offer yourself to this fake!? Show some backbone!"

Who the fuck is your servant? Before Hisui could retort, Mei already reacted to Rushella's words.

"Hey, what do you mean by fake?"

Mei crossed her arms and glared at Rushella.

Rushella's word choice had struck the artificial human's landmine.

"A fake is a fake. No matter how you disguise yourself as human, don't think you can deceive my vampire eyes! To prevent sucking the blood of lowly trash, my kind excels in distinguishing humans from non-humans."

"In other words, you both knew each other's identities already. You should have told me."

Ignoring Hisui's complaints the vampire and the artificial human postured themselves for battle.

"Such grand words... for a mere vampire."

"What!?"

Mei insulted her in turn without backing down.

Vampire vs Frankenstein's creature, the two major monsters were now facing off.

"You say I'm a fake, but aren't vampires simply mosquitoes wearing human skin? No, you are even more lowly than mosquitoes. Mosquitoes can be smacked and they just cause itches after a bit. But your kind deprives humans of their dignity. Unforgivable."

"You bitch...!!"

Hostility. No this was a snarl full of intent to kill.

Crimson colored cold light shot out from her eyes. Originally adding to the allure of her slender hands, those nails also lengthened and became sharp.

With the sun halfway set, all the cells in Rushella's entire body were filled with power.

If she really went crazy, the consequences were unthinkable.

In order not to get the school destroyed on the first day, Hisui had no choice but to try to arbitrate.

"Hey stop it. Godzilla vs Gamera this dreamteam combination should be left for dreams."

"I don't care. I could hardly bother with this bitch. I just don't want my blood to be sucked. Once my kind becomes fully human, it'd be a complete waste of effort, if my blood were sucked."

"As if anyone would suck yours! As an exalted True Ancestor, I will never suck the blood of a fake like you!!"

"...True Ancestor? No way, are you serious!?"

Mei was laughing so hard her shoulders shook.

Rushella's face became even worse. Hisui didn't know what to do.

"True Ancestor means those highest existences by tracing back the lineages of vampires, standing at the very top, right? Why would someone that important be a high school student here?"

"Does an artificial human have the right to say that about me?"

"Aren't all those fossils extinct already? What the heck are you trying to pull?"

"Shut up, I'm real!"

"Then prove it. Using a method that we can both understand, how's that?"

Mei looked at Hisui, approached him and hugged his arm.

Since she can't reenact the pushing down scene again, nevertheless Hisui still remained on alert.

"...Umm, why am I on your side?"

"Oh my, how cold of you... To think we had already progressed to second base already."

"Damn it, I can't even deny that..."

"Hey, get away from him right now! He's my servant!!"

"What, you're not his girlfriend, right? That aside, hurry and prove that you're a True Ancestor."

Mei showed off and pressed Hisui's arm against her breasts.

Rushella did not retort but simply clenched her fists and directed her wrath at Hisui.

"Why are you getting entangled with her!?"

"Actually, she came over and entangled me."

"You're mine, you know!? Didn't I suck your blood this morning too...!?"

"Please don't talk about this morning as though it's a kiss before leaving home..."

Hisui grumbled, Mei stared with her eyes wide.

"Eh... Hey you, your blood was sucked!? But I didn't see any wounds..."

Mei had hoped to have babies with a pure human. She was very surprised.

Hisui who hung around Rushella did not show any symptoms of turning into a vampire.

Naturally, there was not cursed seal on his neck.

"...Were you bitten in a normally concealed spot? But most vampires pick..."

"The neck. The taste turns poor in any other place. Also, it causes problems during the vampirization process, possibly turning a victim into irrational undead walking corpses, so they never drink from anywhere apart from the neck."

"Then could it be that you've turned completely to a vampire...?"

"Do I look like one?"

Hisui's tone of voice indicated he had never let go of his humanity.

Hearing that, Mei recalled his actions over the past day.

Even in the process of vampirization, victims would show a tendency to avoid sunlight, but Hisui did not.

But Rushella clearly said she sucked his blood.

"...What is going on?"

"This guy is a freak. Even though I sucked his blood, he hasn't turned into my servant!"

Rushella spoke angrily. Hugging Hisui's arm, Mei simply stared in surprise at this "freak" according to the vampire.

"No way... can something like that be true? I know it too... A vampire's bite is the highest level 'curse' and 'poison'... once bitten whether a saint or a sinner, both end up the same way, right!?"

"I am just an ordinary human."

Hisui declared indifferently. Mei became even more interested, her eyes turning passionate.

Rushella was getting impatient with the two hugging so closely. She waved her arms and snarled.

"It's about time you let go! He's my servant!!"

"What? He's not turning into a vampire, right?"

"Shut~ up~! He will be mine sooner or later!! Hurry and let go!!"

Mei ignored Rushella's protests and her sweet voice whispered into Hisui's ear.

"Hey, show me where you were bitten. I want to know what it's like."

"There. If it's me, there won't be a wound. Look."

Hisui did not take special precautions and stretched his neck to show Mei.

Mei brought her lips close to that pale white neck.

Kiss.

Unlike a vampire's kiss, her seductive and sweet lips lightly touched Hisui's neck.

"...Hey, what are you doing!?"

"Disinfecting, just disinfecting. Doesn't it feel much better than a vampire's bite?"

"That's true..."

Recalling the soft sensation on his neck, Hisui was filled with joy and could only look up at the ceiling.

This caused Rushella's anger to reach its peak.

"What are you doing!? To think you would do this with that kind of woman...! Shameless!!"

"Say, I didn't even leave a hickey... You don't have to get that mad, do you...?"

"Are you a man who easily offers his neck to others...? Are you fine with anyone!?"

"Could you stop with that description? You're making it sound like I'm some kind of easy woman, okay!? Besides, why do I have to give you priority? Clearly you're so clumsy at blood sucking."

Faced with Rushella's unreasonable squabbling, Hisui let loose all his dissatisfaction all at once.

Mei poured more fuel on the fire.

"Eh, what, this child is clumsy at blood sucking? Eh, isn't a vampire's bite supposed to be accompanied by sexual pleasure? Especially when sucking a member of the opposite sex."

"Because of my constitution, I guess the pleasure is rendered moot as well... Anyway, it really hurts."

Hearing Hisui's feelings, Rushella suddenly went expressionless.

Tears were faintly seeping out the corners of her eyes, but Hisui and Mei did not notice.

"Wow~ To think one really existed, this kind of worthless vampire. Say, if even blood sucking is clumsy, then what value of existence is there? Let alone a True Ancestor, not even trash level. Really, that's mosquito level."

"Hey, that's going a bit too far..."

Hisui was halfway through when his cheek was met with a light punch.

"......Idiot."

By the time he came to his senses, he found Rushella standing before him.

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Ah..."

Hisui did not get a chance to speak. The tiny fists began to rain down on him.

"Idiot idiot idiot idiot idiot idiot idiot idiot idiot!!"

"Hey stop it, it hurts!"

A childish attack purely for venting emotions.

But as a vampire after all, every hit from this careless attack was still heavier than a normal human's. But compared to physical pain, this feeling was strongest in Hisui's heart.

"Idiot!"

Rushella raised her parasol and smashed it towards Hisui as a final strike. Then without looking back, she ran out of the classroom.

"Ah, hey...!"

Hisui had only taken a single step when a cold voice stopped him.

"Don't go. What do you intend to do once you catch up to her?"

Mei asked coldly.

Rather than merciless, her tone of voice sounded full of rationality.

"You were not made her servant successfully, right? You simply had your blood sucked. A one-sided victim. You also don't seem to be under the mystic eyes' control. Neither are you in love with her."

"... Of course not."

"Then just leave her alone. It's better for both of you."

Mei's tone of voice sounded very experienced.

That was probably not just her personal thoughts but the lesson learned by her entire race's experiences.

"Things will never sail smoothly in a relationship between a human and a non-human. That's the case with us. With an appearance that anyone could tell was non-human, you should know what kind of life Frankenstein's creature lived through, right?"

"..."

Even among themselves, humans have not escaped from bias and discrimination.

Let alone when the other party was outside the realm of humans.

"She's only treating you as food. Don't be fooled by her tears."

"...I know."

"So... come... with me❤"

Mei held Hisui's hand and started to hassle him.

Hisui simply shook her hand off mercilessly and left the classroom.

Refusing to admit defeat, Mei called out from behind.

"I haven't given up yet. I'm even more interested now. I will surely make you mine and mine alone!!"

Ignoring her declaration, Hisui departed, expressionless.

Translator's Notes and References:

1. Relative: The word used to describe "relative" is "someone close", in here it probably mean "guardian".
2. Locker room: The one in Japan where the students put on their shoes

Chapter 3 - Unresponsive Cross

By the time Hisui stepped out of the school gates, the sun had already set.

He should be elated by the arrival of Saturday, a holiday, tomorrow, but his footsteps felt incomparably burdened.

The vampire had thrown an inexplicable temper tantrum and run off on her own—clearly that was all that had happened.

"So tired......"

Hisui listlessly murmured, walking without purpose.

In his hands were his school bag and the parasol Rushella had left behind.

Although it was past sunset and Rushella did not need the parasol—this was her personal belonging after all.

Leaving it behind should have been fine, but for some reason, Hisui picked it up when leaving the classroom.

It was not as if the thought of returning it to its owner had not occurred to him. However, he did not know the owner's current location.

If one had to hazard a guess, she was most likely at Hisui's own home.

Since they had parted on such poor terms after the ridiculous dispute, Hisui did not expect her to continue insisting on living in his house. But since her coffin was still there, she would have to return at least once.

Although vampires did not have to sleep in coffins, they provided cover from sunlight and helped recover fatigue and spiritual powers, hence coffins were necessary items. Especially high "class" vampires were very particular about their coffins and liked to have them custom made. Rushella's coffin was probably the same.

If she really were to leave him, she would surely take it with her.

Besides, she might be done with her move. By the time he got home, it was possible that she might have left already.

To think the day that they would go their separate ways would arrive so simply, Hisui could not help but make a wry expression.

Besides, why did he have to waste brain cells on a noisy and arrogant girl?

Suddenly biting him, calling herself his master on her own, a willful vampire.

Chasing him to his home, chasing him to school... so troublesome beyond compare.

Even in drinking blood she was so clumsy...... most annoyingly, she made him once again aware of his unusual constitution.

He originally wanted to forget it completely.

He originally wanted to forget about his constitution and live like an ordinary human being.

"Such a pain in the ass......"

Hisui muttered to himself. At this moment, he felt cold water drops on his face.

"It's raining huh......"

Hisui looked up at the sky. The rain drops instantly blotted the sky and poured down violently.

The weather report had not predicted this rain. The surrounding pedestrians were all caught in the sudden disaster.

The rain was astounding, causing people in the streets to hold up bags or magazines as substitute umbrellas as they made their way rapidly through the rain.

Watching them, Hisui suddenly recalled the parasol in his hand.

Rushella had mentioned—this could be used as an ordinary umbrella, able to handle unexpected rain with ease, a fine treasure. In other words, it was used by vampires to defend against living, flowing water that they feared.

But currently, it was not in Rushella's hand.

The sudden rain did not care whom it was pouring down on, simply continuing nonstop.

Thinking seriously, this sort of worry was perhaps part of his overactive emotions.

Whether Rushella was outdoor—he did not know.

Whether Rushella had returned to his home—he did not know.

Whether Rushella was in trouble because she forgot her umbrella—he did not know.

Even if he delivered the umbrella to her hands, surely, definitely—she would not have pleasant words for him.

Clearly this result could be easily guessed, but Hisui did not slow down at all.

The road was wet and he almost slipped a number of times. His sight was also foggy. His stamina was also draining gradually as a result of getting drenched.

Yet Hisui still did not rest and ran straight for home.

Finally, when the front entrance entered into view, Hisui was already panting out of breath. Using the last of his strength, he opened the gate and stepped into the garden in front of the entryway.

"You......!"

Clearly he had hoped he was worrying too much, but Rushella appeared before his eyes in the worst possible state.

Flowing water: a vampire's weakness. And in one of its typical states—a girl drenched in rainwater was trembling slightly, collapsed in front of the entryway.

"Hey, are you okay!?"

Hisui held her in his arms and shook her but could not get any response.

Rushella's eyes were tightly closed, her lips blue, her entire body trembling, her body stiff, her temperature low. Even her pristine white skin was turning into sickly pallor.

Flowing water was a weakness but not a fatal one. But due to standing out in a rainstorm for a long period of time, the damage was still severe.

Rushella's body was virtually like a corpse right now. Her heart beat was very weak, her entire metabolism slowed to a crawl.

"What are you doing here!?"

Because the sudden rain weakened her, with no umbrella at hand to shelter from the rain, drenched in this manner, she finally fainted—the process was easily imagined.

However, normally speaking, a vampire could not possibly be caught out in the rain unprotected like this.

After all, vampires themselves were the most sensitive and aware of this weakness.

Hisui clicked his tongue, picked up Rushella in his arms and entered the house.

Although he was drenched as well, he could feel from his arms that Rushella's body temperature was even colder than his, almost as though it had fallen to water's freezing point.

It really felt like—hugging a corpse.

"Don't die okay......!!"

This cry made Rushella's hand twitch slightly but Hisui missed it completely.

He was not even aware that he had used the word "die" instead of "destroyed."

"......?"

Waking up, she found her surroundings warm.

Clearly it was unbearably cold just now, almost chilly enough to cut straight to the bone from a vampire's perspective, but it was quite warm now.

"This place... is.......?"

"You woke up?"

"You......"

Her consciousness still hazy, Rushella sat up from the sofa.

As soon as she got up, Hisui, sitting beside her, frantically turned his face to the other side.

Just as she found it strange, she instantly noticed her appearance.

"Ah—!!"

Looking down, she found herself completely naked. Although she was sleeping under a blanket, due to sitting up, her voluptuous bosom instantly jumped out.

"D-Don't......!"

"I'm—not—looking."

Hisui spoke while keeping his face turned away. He had predicted Rushella's reaction already.

Rushella's raised fist halted in midair, then blushing, she pulled the blanket up to cover herself.

"It's okay now... you can look this way."

Called by Rushella, Hisui faced her again.

He had already put on his usual sleep outfit of a T-shirt and shorts. He had also taken a bath, thereby warming up his body that had been drenched in the rain.

Rushella surveyed the room as though to confirm the situation.

This was Hisui's living room. The air conditioner was blowing warm air. The temperature was originally winter-like, but now the room was nice and warm. The blanket earlier had also served to help her stay warm.

"Why... was I naked?"

With the key issue raised, Hisui avoided eye contact and answered.

"...If you stay in wet clothing, you'll catch a cold, right? By the way, I kept my eyes closed while taking your clothes off. Then all I did was help wipe you dry. Because there was a towel, I didn't feel anything at all."

"...Really?"

"I'm not so depraved that I'd make a move on an unconscious girl."

"Just this once... I'll believe you."

"Thanks."

The two of them seemed to be suffering from some kind of dialogue disability.

As if trying to find each other, searching for each other's location... The two tried hard to form words.

"You helped warm me up? For me......"

"...Yeah. But not like in movies where two people hug together naked. If I really did that, you'll surely kill me. Besides, I'm not that warm either, I'd just make you colder."

"I see......"

Normally, no matter how Hisui explained himself, Rushella would still attack...... but today, she seemed unusually honest.

In any case, she looked so frail, combined with the pure whiteness of her body, one would only think of her as a frail and vulnerable young beauty.

"This thing, you forgot it."

Hisui casually handed the parasol to Rushella.

The owner received her lost item and simply stared blankly at it.

"Isn't this a vampire's necessity? Why did you leave it lying around?"

"Because......"

Rushella pouted.

Because she did not have any legitimate reason. She had simply thrown a tantrum like a child and caught in the mood, she threw the parasol away.

"Why were you standing in the rain? Even if you didn't have an umbrella, you could have found shelter, right?"

"It suddenly rained when I was at your entrance. I didn't have time to find shelter......"

"Then you could have broken the glass on the door and entered, right? Even if the rain weakened you, that's within your ability, isn't it?"

Hisui pointed out an easily imagined solution. Rushella simply answered softly:

"...I was afraid, you'd get angry......"

"......"

Apparently she fainted in the rain because she was hung up over such a matter.

While she was hesitating, the rain fell harder, in the end, she did not even have time to come up with a different plan—that was probably how it went.

"...Anyway, let's put that aside. Come here."

Hisui extended his neck and pointed at it.

Seeing Rushella cock her head in puzzlement, he added reluctantly:

"Hurry and drink."

"...Why? Aren't you always unwilling to let me suck your blood?"

"After all, when that girl pushed me down... you saved me."

Hisui treated this as a return favor. However, he did not look into Rushella's eyes.

"Even a vampire would recover very slowly if they were hurt due to their weak spots. Drenched by that much rain, drinking blood is the best way to recover faster. You should know that better than me, right?"

Hisui's words were very unbiased and objective, but Rushella did not take action.

Clearly she never considered his feelings before when sucking his blood in the past—pouting, she averted eye contact.

"What, you're not satisfied with my blood now?"

"...After all, I suck blood very clumsily, right!?"

Rushella covered her face with the blanket and spoke with despair.

Although Hisui could not see her face, she seemed to be weeping.

"Say......"

Hisui showed an exasperated expression

Apparently, his honest opinion had damaged this proud lady's self-esteem.

"......Now is not the time to mind that, right?"

"........."

Rushella remained silent, staring at Hisui resentfully.

It looked like the comment had struck her in a sore spot.

"...Clumsy, well... It's because of that. You're still not used to it, right? After all, you lost your memories. You should be able to retrieve the feeling, since you're a 'True Ancestor' after all."

"...You really believe it? That I'm a 'True Ancestor'?"

"........."

"Even if I call myself a 'True Ancestor'... I have no way to prove it. If I had servants or family, they could help me prove it but I'm just alone... I can't prove anything."

Rushella spoke in self-mockery.

She belonged nowhere in the world. Just a lonely vampire.

Having only awakened last night, she had not even seen any of her own kind.

Solitary—all she knew was that she was a 'True Ancestor' class vampire.

Nevertheless, even this one fact cannot be proven.

"By the way—what exactly are 'True Ancestors'? I just know the literal meaning of the words, but never truly understood the term as an existence......"

"Same for me as a human. Even among vampires, those who truly understand the term can probably be counted on one hand—no, maybe not even that. The only ones who can understand it are the 'True Ancestors' themselves."

Indeed, speaking of the greatest secret in vampire legends, nothing surpassed that of the 'True Ancestors.'

For a vampire, the one who had sucked their blood was their 'master.' And the masters in turn had their own masters.

Tracing this cycle all the way back, the entity known as the 'True Ancestor' was the final end point.

Also, there existed offspring between vampires. They were called the "Pure." And tracing back the lineage of the "Pure" to the very source, the progenitor's existence was known as the "True Ancestor."

Blood sucking and mating were the two methods by which the birth of new vampires was achieved.

Vampires did not exist in isolation, but instead belonged to complicated and massive family lineages through these two methods of procreation.

And taking the most primitive spot at the top of these lineages, ruling from the summit was the existence that was the "True Ancestor."

Given so many servants and descendants, then the existence of a first "master" or "progenitor" was only natural.

So—where did these 'True Ancestors' come from?

There was no clear answer to this most natural question.

"Who on earth... am I? Why would......"

Rushella's eyes were glimmering from a faint hint of tears. Hisui indifferently said to her:

"It's blood."

"......?"

Hearing Hisui's incomprehensible words, Rushella finally looked up to face him.

"How to identify a 'True Ancestor'—it's by blood. Vampires find blood sweet and tasty but humans do not experience the same feeling. It's just an ordinary liquid. But the blood of a 'True Ancestor' is different. Even humans or vampires belonging to different clans would be charmed by the blood of a 'True Ancestor.' That type of blood gives off a rose's fragrance, compelling people to taste it... It's said that the taste is sweet enough to melt your heart and soul. That said, I have no interest in drinking it."

"You......"

"Also, when the blood is shed, the droplet of blood will produce a stain, forming a certain pattern. Completely defying the laws of physics. It's also said that there's a difference in color, but that's about all I know."

"......"

Hisui spoke coolly while Rushella listened with a calm expression.

Then listening to this point, as if guided by his voice, she reached for her short sword on the table.

Hisui immediately called to stop her with a sharp tone of voice.

"Don't do anything reckless."

"But……"

"Whether you're a 'True Ancestor' or not, it doesn't matter to me. You are you, that's all. If you want to obsess over that, I don't care but save it for when your body has recovered."

"……"

"Okay, hurry and drink. If you delay too long, I might change my mind."

Urged, Rushella approached Hisui timidly.

Originally called a "kiss," the act of blood drinking was actually carried out like a kiss right now.

In order to stabilize her body that was still unsteady, Rushella slowly wrapped her supple arms around Hisui's neck. Her bountiful bosom pressed against Hisui's chest and their heartbeats were superimposed as one.

Then unlike previously violent and forced attempts, Rushella's lips touched Hisui's neck with utmost gentleness.

Nibble.

Rather than sinking her fangs by instinct, she bit lightly the way a pet might engage in play biting with the master.

As blood seeped from the wound, Rushella did not suck hard, instead she lapped lightly. Even the drops of fresh blood spilling out of the corners of her mouth, she would lick the clean with the tip of her tongue. Preventing the blood from staining the area surrounding the neck, she used her red tongue to carefully lick Hisui's skin thoroughly.

"Mmm......."

The ticklish feeling caused Hisui to stir.

This time, it did not hurt at all.

He could even go so far as to say it was comfortable. If an analogy was needed, it would be similar to the feeling of sucking your wounded finger.

The duration of blood sucking was quite brief. Rushella stopped soon after and left Hisui's body.

A silver thread of saliva connected the two of them.

"...Is that enough, you're only drinking this little?"

"Yeah......"

Rushella nodded and shyly pulled up the blanket, returning to the sofa.

Seeing her recovered to some extent, Hisui stood up.

"Since you can move, go take a bath, it'll feel warmer."

"Eh......"

"Your drenched clothes are not dry yet. If you're willing, just settle with using mine for now. In second floor, the room on the right, the clothes are in the closet."

Saying that, Hisui walked to the kitchen next to the living room.

Rushella stared in a daze at his back. After watching for a while, she stood up in a stumbling manner.

Roughly an hour later, Hisui laid out the diningware on the low table in the living room.

Since he had not even had a proper meal since the night before, Hisui decided to have sumptuous feast tonight.

Placed on the table were a plate of carbonara pasta, a large bowl of salad and vegetable soup.

There were also plates for eating—the table was set for two people.

Right after he finished preparing, Hisui heard someone enter the living room.

Rushella had just exited the bath.

"Oh, you're done with your bath... Hey, why did you pick that one to wear!?"

The beauty straight out of the bath—Rushella—was wearing nothing but a white shirt.

There was nothing underneath and the shirt's top was wide open. Her breasts were at risk of spilling out any moment. Even the protruding tips' shapes, poking at the shirt, were fully visible despite the fabric.

One could accidentally catch glimpses of the the base of her slender thighs if one were not careful... Hisui tried his best to shift his gaze away from the danger zone.

"Isn't that my uniform......? I intended to wear it on Monday, that's why I hung it on the clothes rack......"

"You asked me to find clothing to wear. This one is able to cover up the bottom as well. It also feels nice."

Rushella spoke with satisfaction, completely unabashed.

"Fine, whatever you want...... sit down first. I made more than enough. Although I'm very hungry, I don't think I'll finish it all."

Only after Hisui indicated towards the low table which was laden with food did Rushella notice the situation.

With a wary expression, she looked towards Hisui for confirmation.

"May I......?"

"Didn't I already say I made extra? Relax, I didn't put garlic. In fact, I've hardly ever eaten garlic my whole life. Even chili peppers, I haven't eaten them recently."

"...In that case, how did you get that stuff all over me yesterday?"

"I happened to buy it because of a sale. After all...... that annoying person's no longer in this house."

"……?"

Rushella could sense some kind of underlying message in Hisui's words but she simply sat opposite him instead of asking about it.

Watching him clap his hands together and go "itadakimasu", she could not help but imitate him.

"Itadaki, masu……"

Next, the meal started.

Rushella used her fork to curl up the pasta and observed for a while, then finally shoved it in her mouth with determination.

"…Delicious."

"Thank you."

Hisui said emotionlessly.

Rushella smiled and began to eat harmoniously.

When the food on the table was almost finished by the two of them, Rushella spoke up as though she remembered something.

"...Hey."

"Hmm?"

"About yourself, tell me stuff too......"

"Huh?"

Hisui was drinking his soup and cocked his head, unable to understand what Rushella was referring to.

"After seeing the world during the daytime today... I understand now. Very likely, my race has dwindled to few survivors in the current world. Even if there are survivors, they hide away and spend their days in the shadows. Hence, humans do not know of our existence. But you're different. You understand too much, particularly about 'True Ancestors'... ordinary humans won't know that much, right?"

"......"

"You said you used to know someone who's a vampire, right? You heard from that... person?"

Rushella gazed intently at him.

Hisui wanted to just dismiss her casually, but in the end could not win against her serious gaze. Shrugging, he returned his cup to the table.

"Rather than someone I knew...... I guess family would be more accurate?"

"Why did you lie to me!?"

"I didn't lie. That still counts as someone I know, right? If I told you that, you'd press the issue so I just worded it ambiguously."

"What a sly way you have with words...... but what's with this talk of family? Are you actually......"

"We're not blood related. Probably, you can think of that person as the foster parent who raised me? As much as I hate to admit that."

Instantly, Hisui's expression was filled with an air of reminiscence.

That appeared to be—a very sorrowful air.

"A person your age should usually live with your mother and father, right? Your parents—"

"Were dead. I don't even remember their faces. Then from what I've heard, I was adopted by a vampire before I was old enough to know things."

"That person... a woman?"

"...Why is gender the most important thing you care about?"

Hisui remarked with surprise.

Rushella looked a bit miffed and continued to press the matter.

"Cut the crap!! She's a woman, right!?"

"Fine, yes......"

"What kind of woman!? Prettier than me!?"

"This sort of subjective question varies from person to person, right? She looked older than you. Who knows how old she was actually."

"Advanced in years!? Then it's my victory!"

"...Who the heck knows. Besides, do vampires even have the concept of getting old? Although I don't know what you're deluding yourself about, a vampire adopting a human probably happened on a whim. Once fattened and matured, she planned to suck my blood?"

Ultimately, just a vampire and her food—that was Hisui's conclusion.

Rushella remained skeptical and stared intently at Hisui as she asked:

"That woman... what happened to her?"

"She's dead."

Without any sorrow, a completely monotone answer.

Rushella looked apologetic and did not know what to say. Hisui continued with his meal, unfazed.

Although Hisui was not depressed nor was he struck with sad nostalgia, Rushella still noticed something strange about his words.

Dead—this was a term that could only be applied to the living, to those with finite lives.

Hence, 'death' was not a concept used for vampires.

Their fates ended not in 'death' but 'destruction.'

As for why, that was because they were already dead.

At least, based on the concept of human 'life', they were already outside existences.

However—he had just used 'dead' to describe the vampire who had raised him.

Basically treating her as human.

"What was she like... as a vampire?"

"A strange woman. Although Japan counts as her base, she still ran around all over the world. Because I accompanied her, I never went to school properly until middle school. This house was also hers. Right, one more thing......"

"What?"

"She was a 'True Ancestor.'"

"WHAAAAAT!?"

Rushella's face was filled with shock.

On their first encounter, she discovered that Hisui was unfazed by the sight of vampires, calm to a suspicious degree—combined with his constitution, she wondered if she had sucked blood from someone of extraordinary stature!?

"That's what she said. I don't know the specifics. Because I lived with her, I could not help but learn plenty of knowledge about vampires. But personally, I'm still just an ordinary high school student."

"You're fine despite getting your blood sucked by me. That doesn't sound very ordinary to me."

"Yeah, but only when my blood is sucked. When I'm not losing blood, I'm no different from ordinary people. My constitution only acts up when a vampire bites me. I don't want to talk about it. Having seen human society today, have you remembered anything?"

"No......"

Rushella shook her head sadly. Her core memories about herself were still very uncertain.

"However, I did have some results. First of all, I've decided I need to understand more about the human world. This will surely have intimate relations to my origins."

"I see... okay."

"So... I will be going to school too!"

Rushella acted majestically as usual and declared loudly.

"EHHHHHHHH!?"

Perhaps things would be better if she had not recovered.

Seeing Rushella's conceited look, Hisui's face began to twitch.

"Eh, what the heck, you're going to go to my high school on Monday too?"

"Of course! Besides, you're my servant, it's your job to serve by my side!!"

"I refuse!! How important do you think you are!?"

"I am the great 'True Ancestor' of the vampires!!"

Rushella proudly puffed out her massive chest.

Hisui secretly regretted saving her and watched from the corner of his eye as Rushella stood up and left the living room.

Then she quickly returned with a sack in her hand, large enough to hold a human head.

"What's that?"

"I kept it in the coffin."

Rushella did not answer the question but poured the contents onto the floor.

Out from the sack came a lustrous golden brilliance.

Accompanied by crisp metallic sounds, they scattered all over the floorboards.

"This..."

Hisui picked one up for a closer look. Unbelievably, it was a gold coin, roughly the size of a 500yen coin, with a pattern like someone's face on top, but who knew what time period and what country the coin was from. Clearly it was not merely gilded but forged out of highly pure gold.

There were roughly five hundred of these gold coins rolling on the floor, instantly filling the house with a swathe of golden magnificence.

The scene in the room was like opening a treasure chest in a fairy tale.

"What's this, your accumulated wealth for hibernating?"

"Although I don't know its exact value, it should be worth quite a lot, right?"

"Of course, this is real gold after all... but it needs to be converted into cash first."

"I see. So, umm... basically, yeah, umm that......"

Rushella spoke in an arrogant tone of voice as she sneaked glances at Hisui's reaction.

"This can count as 'rent', right?"

"Huh?"

Hisui was increasingly befuddled by her words.

Rushella awkwardly fiddled with her fingers and looked up at Hisui.

"Umm...... If I go to school, I need an address. It's too troublesome to find a new one...... besides, you're my servant, so staying by my side is your obligation without question!! Indeed, you should be the one kneeling down and begging me!! Hurry up and prostrate yourself to beg me to allow you by my side!!"

"Huh——!?"

Hisui's face twisted.

He really should not have saved her. He should have simply cast her aside.

He began to deeply regret everything he had done for her. Rushella then began to pick up the scattered gold coins. Then holding a full pile in her hands, she presented them to Hisui.

"You don't want... them? This, isn't enough......?"

"You......"

"Staying here...... I can't......?"

Just like the time when she confessed her memory loss, Rushella's voice was helpless and dream-like.

Like the color of her skin, her existence was so fragile that it seemed as though the surrounding scenery would be dyed white.

Hisui scratched his head and took one gold coin from Rushella's hands.

"I'll use it as a lucky charm."

Saying that, Hisui stood up, cleared the table and took the utensils back to the kitchen.

"Wait, you......"

"After all, this isn't my home originally. It's the house of your kin."

"......"

"So basically... even if some vampire of unknown origins lived here, I won't have any objections."

Hisui spoke with his back towards her. Rushella instantly burst into smiles.

Her unease dispelled, she instantly recovered an expression that befitted her teenaged face.

This change could be sensed even with his back turned towards her. Hisui then said indifferently:

"The inner room on the second floor...... should be the most convenient for you to use. There's thick curtains to block light so you don't need to worry in the mornings. Also, it's the most spacious bedroom."

"Yes!"

As if wanting to see her bedroom immediately, Rushella raced up to the second floor.

Hisui smiled wryly and began to wash the dishes.

In a blink of an eye, it was late night already—Hisui went down to the basement at home.

The basement's layout was very spacious, basically an open area the size of the entire floor.

The room was built with solid rock with a library, wine cellar, food storage and used antique candlesticks for lighting, giving a decrepit medieval atmosphere—in other words, very much filled with a vampire's style.

Rushella had already gone to bed in the room he assigned to her. Originally, he had thought about providing the basement to her who did not like sunlight.

But Hisui did not do that.

Because the object before his eyes did not permit the existence of vampires in the basement.

Stabbed into the ground, this object was a vampire's weakness rivaling sunlight.

Namely, a cross.

Standing at a tilt, entrenched in the ground, its size was large enough to crucify a human on it.

The luster of its surface resembled that of pure silver. A pristine and flawless exterior.

The cross' edges were polished to be as sharp as knives, with the four ends shaped like "hooks" that resembled arrowheads or harpoons.

Criss-crossing the center were decorations of crimson gemstones. Wrapped over it were chains symbolizing dogma.

Although the style of the design was different from the ones usually found in churches, this did not affect the sacred impression the cross exuded.

Ordinary crosses used as signs or decorations did not pose any threat to vampires.

But this cross right here was the real thing.

It was a crucifix for exterminating evil and purifying the world.

Furthermore, it was the the tombstone of the former master of this home and this place.

Hisui gazed at the cross, his eyes wavering with indescribable sorrow.

Facing the cross for a long while, Hisui said softly in a grumbling manner:

"Hey...... Is this house cursed by any chance? A weird vampire has moved in, you know? Are you scheming something? She's sleeping in your room now."

The silver cross remained unresponsive.

It could not answer in the first place.

"You were dead already but another one came. Clearly I don't want to be involved with your kind anymore, but here I go running into one again."

The cross remained silent.

Unresponsive.

Hisui bent down and stared at the crimson gemstone inlaid in the silver cross.

"Come on, say something...... Miraluka."

The cross did not respond.

The tombstone simply chose to reject the living through silence.

The dead could not resurrect.

No matter how he interrogated, his questions simply resounded through empty space.

Although Hisui knew it was futile even before coming here, in the end, nothing changed.

Listlessly, he left the basement.

"Ow ow ow!!"

The next morning, even without an annoying alarm clock, Hisui still could not enjoy waking up in a natural and comfortable manner.

After a tempestuous first day at school, it was Saturday immediately.

Just as he planned to prepare for the official start of high school life next week by getting proper rest, he suddenly felt a sharp pain on his neck.

Opening his eyes...... there was a vampire slurping away at his blood in the same posture as yesterday.

"What are you doing... Rushella-san!?"

"What am I doing? First blood in the morning. After a bath, this is the perfect taste."

Rushella declared openly. Her body felt warm and still had some humidity.

Her pale white body was wrapped in nothing but a bath towel.

Enjoy a drink of blood after a bath like yesterday.

"Who asked you to take a bath so casually!? Didn't you take baths last night already!? Are you Shizuka!?"[1]

"Shut up, I took a bath first so that the blood will taste better!"

"Why do you have to take a bath to make someone else's blood tastier when you suck it!? Isn't that completely reversing means and goals!? Also, get away, it hurts!"

"What are you saying to your master!? I paid already!"

"Japan has no system of blood selling! Besides, you're wrong if you think you can buy my blood with a single gold coin, it's not that cheap!!"

"You're really noisy, anyway, who cares!?"

Rushella pressed down from above while Hisui struggled below.

While struggling, Hisui unmistakably touched Rushella's massive bosom—the bath towel slid and fell.

"D-Don't look——!!"

"Say, this is your own fault......!!"

This scene, familiar to both of them, was reenacted once more as the house echoed with screams and groans.

Vampire and human, master and servant.

Thus the curtain rose for the drama of Hisui and Rushella's life together.

Translator's Notes and References:

1. Shizuka(静香): Doraemon character who has a passion for baths. [http://doraemon.wikia.com/wiki/Shizuka_Minamoto]

Chapter 4 - Sacrificial Lamb

"So basically, Hi-kun, you do it with that amnesiac True Ancestor once a day?"

"Could you not say it in such a weird way!? I just get my blood sucked, okay? It's not fun at all, okay!?"

"That's doing it, right? Then about that child, have you figured out things out?"

"...No clues so far. Say, I'm begging you, can you use a different description..."

After school, Hisui was lying on the desk in the classroom listlessly.

The classmates had left and the classroom had no one but him and Mei beside him.

After the weekend, several days had passed. Rushella had started attending school officially. Hisui hardly interacted with other classmates but often conversed with Mei like this.

During today's chat, Hisui tried asking her opinion on Rushella's origins but Mei and her "race" did not know too much about vampires.

"...Where did that girl pop up from anyway?"

Using the weekend, Hisui searched for Rushella's origins by every means available to him but still had no clues currently.

He tried going to the forest where she woke up. Because there are no signs of people there, one could not expect witnesses. Hisui had confirmed the coffin's position and there were clear marks where it had been placed but yielded no clues on when it was placed there.

Hisui tried to get Rushella's gold coins certified at a antique shop but apart from the fact that they were genuine gold coins, nothing was known: time period, country or region, nothing. According to the antique dealer, it might have been simply molded but never used in circulation.

"So the weekend ended up wasted like that. I spent my precious holiday on nothing."

"Oh dear, but weren't you quite happy to go on a walk with her. When that child was trying on clothes, you were commenting 'that looks nice on you.' You even visited the underwear corner together with her."

"No, that's just her dragging me off to buy daily necessities and clothes... I already bought them for her, but she still wears my shirt at home... Hey, how did you know!?"

"I was buying my spring wardrobe when I ran into you guys by chance. Then I followed and watched you."

"What do you mean 'followed and watched'!? Don't speak so readily like a stalker as though it's normal!"

"Don't underestimate me. My ancestors over the generations were all professional stalkers. For revenge, it meant following the creator closely. If this ability is used for love, can you imagine the consequences?"

Hisui did not want to imagine at all.

Based on the original novel's ending, even if he escaped to the North Pole, she would most likely follow.

"...It feels like you're more and more removed from a high school girl."

"Oh dear, are you saying I have problem somewhere?"

Mei brought her face close.

Thanks to the top two open buttons on her uniform, the cleavage of Mei's massive bust and her pink bra entered Hisui's view.

She was a girl who rivaled Rushella in beauty, this was the worst part.

To be honest, if Mei went all out, Hisui had no confidence if he could resist her "baby making."

Hisui blushed and turned his gaze away, then an unexpected savior arrived.

"Let's go home... Hey, why are you here!?"

Seeing Mei, Rushella frowned and approached.

She was wearing a uniform that was just fitted during the weekend. Without the parasol, she'd probably look like a very proper high school student.

"Where I go is my freedom right? Before I obtain Hi-kun, I won't leave!"

"What is Hi-kun?"

"Hisui, therefore Hi-kun. Get it? Also, one day, I'll be calling him Hiihii❤"

"Absolutely not."

Despite Hisui's protests against this strange nickname, Mei did not seem like she was going to take it back.

She looked very assured of victory and walked towards Rushella.

"No matter how you dress up it's useless. A vampire should just sleep obediently in a coffin until night falls, right?"

"You fake doll is the same, just stand quietly and act the part of decoration, okay?"

The two girls faced off, a battle about to spark off.

A moment later, they both went "hmph" and walked past each other.

Mei went for the classroom's exit and left a word of warning.

"You'd better be careful, Hi-kun. Even if you can keep your constitution a secret from other humans, if you continue to hang around a vampire, you'll be treated as one of their kind."

"...Perhaps."

The boy who was raised by a vampire stared blankly in response, watching Mei leave.

Rushella walked up to him and blocked his view.

"...What?"

"You, umm... you like that type of woman?"

"Who could possibly like a woman who suddenly pushes you down... she's aiming for my body totally. Just the body. That kind of terrible relationship between the sexes, I don't quite..."

"Really... then good. Let's go home."

Rushella nodded satisfied and urged Hisui to return.

Moments later, the two exited the school gates and made their way home.

"By the way, did you join any of those 'klub' things?"

Rushella must be asking because she attended the clubs introduction gathering? That was a gathering where upperclassmen introduced the clubs to the new students.

Hisui's interest was zero to begin with, so he answered completely unenthusiastically.

"Nope. If anything, I'd be in the go-home club."

"What's that? They didn't mention it today!?"

"The activities consist of this: after a tiring day of classes, to sing praises to the springtime of youth after school. The greatest trouble is usually the homeroom teacher talking too much rubbish during homeroom before dismissal. This is mostly due to the homeroom teacher's personality. I guess I'm lucky since our homeroom is much shorter than the other classes."

"Basically, you mean going home directly. Don't just keep blabbering nonstop."

"You get it now."

Rushella was gradually acquiring modern common sense and it was getting harder and harder to con her.

Although she was still having trouble with her studies, overcoming that was probably just a matter of time.

"The teachers said that the next few days allow visiting times for us to freely observe the 'klubs'... are you going?"

"I'm not interested. Eh, judging from your tone... what, you want to go?"

"I just want to have a look. Umm, those people who're interested in 'klubs' they all look so funloving. I'm just curious... what it's about."

Although she tried to sound nonchalant, Rushella could not hide her great curiosity and interest in club life.

In any case, now that she had food and shelter covered, she was getting interested in all sorts of things.

In school life, she seemed to have targeted club activities. But for a vampire...

"But, umm... you're a..."

"I know. Outdoor stuff is no good. Or rather, anything to do with sports is no good. I know that at least."

Vampires and humans. The difference in physical ability was very obvious even during the daytime when a vampire's activity was most suppressed. If Rushella joined human club activities, this alone would already be cheating.

"So... the cultural ones. Wanna... have a look?"

"Sure, lead the way."

Rushella smiled happily and hung onto his arm.

"W-What are you doing!?"

"Huh? Escorting the master is your job, right?"

"Umm, well, we already left school today, how about tomorrow..."

"Sure."

Although Rushella agreed, she did not let go of Hisui's arm.

"Say, Rushella-san?"

"What?"

"Well, ummm..."

Her body was touching him, such as, her breasts, her breasts, her breasts as well as her breasts or the like.

"What, don't boys and girls walk around like this? See, everyone in the surroundings is doing this."

All the people in Rushella's field of view were couples. Since they were a bit far from school, near the train station, there were many intimate couples holding hands in the surroundings.

Hisui originally wanted to tell her the truth, but to avoid Rushella entering her unreasonable mode, he gave up.

This ojou-sama was so arrogant and conceited yet completely vulnerable in this area.

Only wearing a T-shirt or wrapped in a bath towel at home all the time, but if he pointed it out to her she'd immediately go red in the face and even get violent.

To avoid unnecessary disaster, Hisui continued walking with her arm in arm.

Ulterior motives... of course not.

"Ah... I must go shopping. The milk's out."

"Yes, buy meat too. Don't forget red wine."

"Not buying either. Especially the wine."

"What does it matter!? Your cooking's not bad but it's too plain. I want to eat something a bit more bloody..."

After all as a vampire, Rushella's diet consisted mostly of meat. Not only did she like meat, but she also liked it half-cooked. Probably due to blood, she loved all sorts of dairy products. Also, desserts and sweets.

She also had an unusual personal interest in red wine. Hisui naturally forbade it and currently used grape juice as a standin.

"We're eating roasted fish today. Oh, I'd better buy some radishes to chop up into shreds."

"Then let me have a good drink of blood. I didn't get to drink this morning!?"

"You're the one who overslept. But to me, I thanked the heavens."

"Offering your blood to me is your duty. Even if it's me, I'd start attacking humans indiscriminately if I can't suppress the urge, you know?"

This simple sentence made Hisui's face gloomy.

"Right... that's true, I knew it."

He understood. That's what vampires were as creatures.

Hisui showed a look of comprehension and Rushella released his arm and said:

"You just need to offer your blood to me obediently."

"That's not fun at all. And no matter how many times you did it, you're still so clumsy..."

Hisui frantically covered his mouth halfway.

Timidly he looked at Rushella... But too late, she was already biting her lip, glaring at him.

Ever since the rainy day, this subject was taboo.

Although she was very clumsy in fact, but Hisui had refrained from saying out of consideration for her... but he ended up making a slip of the tongue.

"...Let's go home."

"Umm..."

"...Once I have my memories, surely..."

Rushella spoke angrily and suddenly quickened her pace.

"Hey, wait up...!"

Before Hisui could give chase, Rushella had run out of sight.

But Hisui still pressed on regardless. Leaving the main road, he entered a desolate little alley.

Just as he stopped and looked around for signs of Rushella, a black luxury car stopped beside him.

At the same time, the driver's door opened and a tall man came out.

"You're Kujou Hisui, right?"

Dressed in black including a black tie, black shades, black suit---A man in black like the movies.

He was carrying a black leather briefcase. Apart from his face, everything was black all over.

A handsome face, he looked quite mature and stable, probably thirty or so. His hair was parted slightly to one side and clung tightly to his head, giving an impression very lacking in individuality.

"...I am, what about it?"

"Please come with me."

Hisui answered with wariness.

"...Is something the matter?"

"It'll be explained to you later."

Saying that, the man viciously punched Hisui in the gut at the same time.

"Urghh..."

Hisui doubled over and then he received a karate chop on the back of his head.

The two-hit combo rendered Hisui unconscious immediately. The man skillfully picked up Hisui and threw him in the car.

The car started up and left the scene without a trace.

However---there was one more person at the scene, witnessing everything.

"...Say, are you guys satisfied now~~ kidnappers?"

A few hours after the sudden abduction scene, Hisui yelled in anger.

He was currently in a dimly lit room.

There was a desk and loads of books and documents. Probably an office somewhere.

Before his eyes was probably the desk of some kind of administrator.

But elbows on the table, resting her head on her hands, the person sitting before the desk did not seem to match the surroundings.

"The term kidnapper is quite excessive. Kujou Hisui-san?"

The voice speaking to Hisui sounded very young and cute.

Sitting on the chair, the person matched the voice well and was a delicate and petite girl.

She looked about the age of twelve or thirteen, wearing half-rimmed glasses. The frilly shirt brought out the airs of a maiden. Her cute face was like a doll.

"Using such a barbaric way to bring me here, I don't think there's any word more fitting than kidnappers to describe it, right?"

"I on the other hand believe we are protecting you."

"Who knows. Besides, what's with the series of inexplicable scenes!? A punishment game!?"

Hisui was naturally angry.

Before taken to this room, he had suffered a lot of unreasonable treatment.

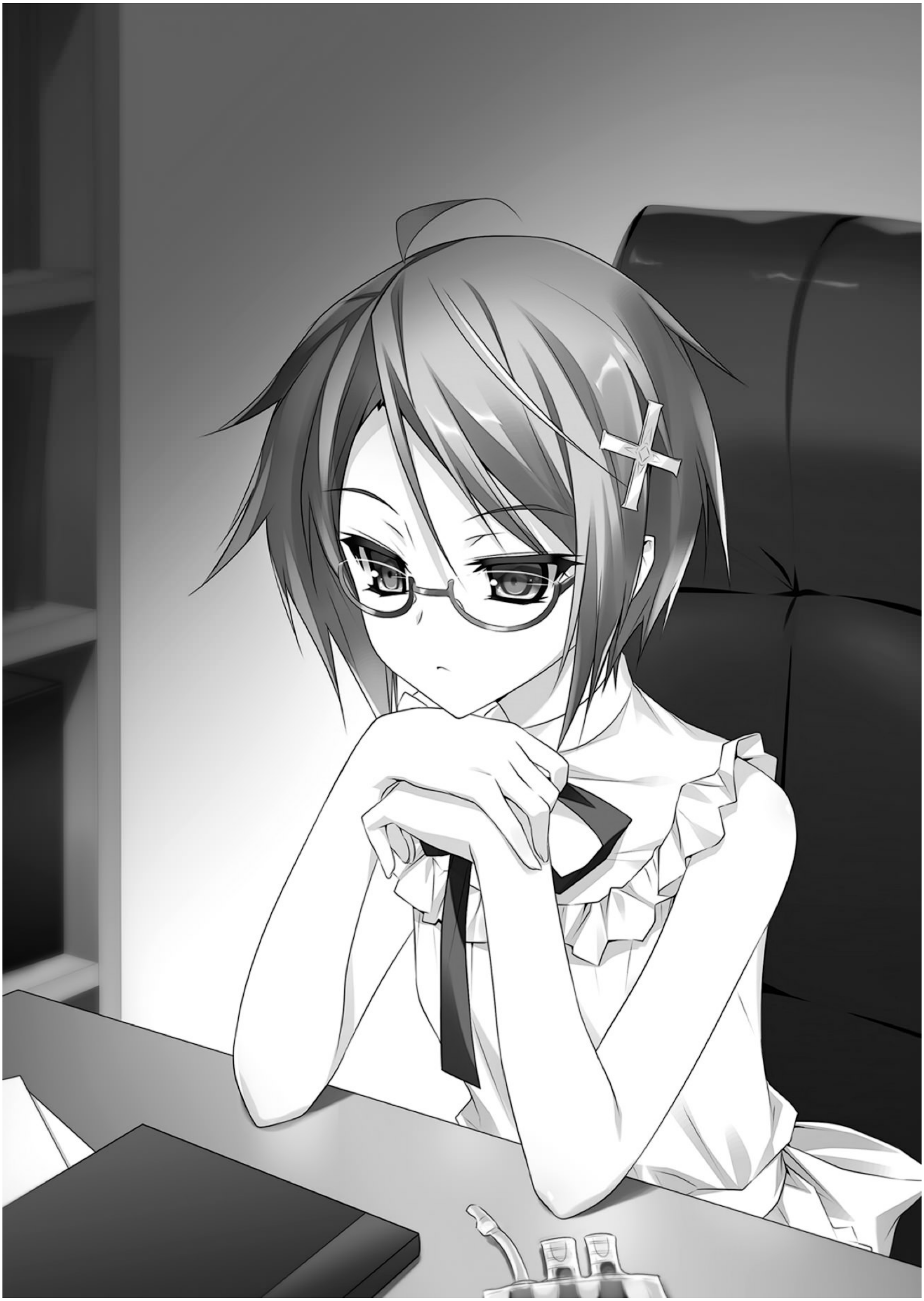
First his blood sample was taken then his head was submerged in a silver container filled with water.

Then he was forced to chew raw garlic, after chewing he instantly had a cross pressed to his face.

Just as he reached the end of his patience, his sight was covered up by a blood transfusion bag.

"Do you want a drink?"

He was even asked such a question.



Naturally, Hisui had no desire to drink so he simply shook his head in surprise. That person ended up pouring the bag's contents into a large wine glass as though saying "Don't be shy, be my guest."

"No, I already said I'm not thirsty."

...After he refused, then came a bunch of incomprehensible procedures, finally he was taken to this room. By the way, his hands were currently cuffed so he was still not free.

"What the fuck... Hey, what are you trying to investigate about me?"

"You still haven't realized? This is just a very ordinary checkup. Checking to see if you're a vampire or a normal human."

The girl spoke coldly, picking up the data in her hand to read.

"Fortunately, you have passed all the tests. How nice, you are still human."

"I don't get what the fuck you're talking about."

Still angry, Hisui did not hold back his words. The girl narrowed her eyes with displeasure.

"Kishida."

Standing on the side, the man nodded. Walking over to Hisui, he handed a name card over.

This man was the culprit who abducted him to this place. Hisui realized that then snatched the name card from him.

"...Metropolitan Police Department Supernatural Investigations Section Special Consultant... Kariya Eruru... what the fuck?"

"Exactly as the words say. Strictly speaking, I am not a civil servant. But because of my knowledge and accomplishments, I have been recruited as an expert. My expertise lies in vampires. Pleased to meet you."

Eruru spoke with a poker face.

Clearly possessing such a cute name and face, yet her behavior was completely not cute at all.

"It seems like I've read it in a feature report on urban legends before... like a special investigations team for solving unclear cases?"

"That's just normal police work. Our job is to investigate cases caused by supernatural entities. And dealing with the culprits. As for the earlier 'examination' you received, you probably understand what you are being suspected of? Do not play stupid, Kujou-san."

Eruru was like a French doll, her large, glimmering eyes stared at Hisui as she spoke.

Judging from the title of special consultant, her age and what she said, she was not an official member of the police. But her sharp gaze was not inferior to an experienced interrogator.

"...That featured report also talked about special police that solved cases that could not be explained by science. The MPD has an underground office or creepy meetings in dimly lit meeting rooms? You belong to this type? An organization that counts as part of the MPD?"

"We are a secret branch. After all the nation cannot admit the existence of supernatural entities to the general public. However, this is the truth. Supernatural creatures roaming the place is a crisis for the nation. Vampires, even more so. Worse comes to worst, it could affect the dignity of citizens. For this purpose, they must be monitored as soon as they are discovered. If victims appear, then they must be quarantined immediately and protected. Just like with you."

"I get it now... so it looks like you guys found out about Rushella. I never thought I could hide her forever... but to think the cat's out of the bag so quickly."

"A collaborator informed us. Due to the nature of our organization, we have collaborators spread out everywhere."

"..."

Hisui felt annoying sweat on his face.

Although he could hazard a guess, he still asked her.

"...The collaborator.. who?"

"Sudou Mei."

"That informant bitch!!"

Hisui felt exhausted.

A type of feeling that he could trust no one.

And Eruru spoke coldly as though insulted.

"Why are you acting surprised like an idiot? Protecting the citizens from supernatural entities is our job. Being informed about non-human creatures is only to be expected, right?"

"Uh, fair enough... but, what does the word collaborator mean?"

"Exactly as it says. Their kind's goal is to become human, hence they bear humans no ill will. Vampires are different. So naturally, we ally with Mei's kind first. To let them live normal human lives, we help them establish public records and birth registrations *etc*. Then in return, they assist us in our missions. Is there any problem with that?"

"...I don't want to say anything at this moment."

"Why are you so depressed? She's simply performing her duty. This is what it means to be doing everything for mankind. An artificial human is acting more human than you. Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

Eruru's words were merciless.

Salt tossed in his wounds, Hisui blankly spoke the truth he realized.

"...It's because of Sudou's report that I was suspected as a victim for hanging around a vampire's side, right?"

"Exactly. However, it is not that easy to distinguish ordinary humans from vampires and humans in the process of turning into vampires. Intricate examinations are required."

"Really? I thought it was easy to tell the difference."

"Naturally a human like you with half-assed knowledge would not know. Vampires have adapted very well to human society. I think even someone like you would know that they fear sunlight. But currently, there exist special light blocking agents that can be applied to the skin to get past that."

"But that medication isn't perfect. After using it, the skin looks shiny and easy to spot. Even high-class medication that cannot be spotted with the naked eye is easily found out through touch. Also, light blocking agents only work for a day at most. Forgetting to reapply it is fatal and cannot be relied on too much. Preparation is also troublesome. Overcoming the weakness to sunlight is a dream. If they want to walk about in daylight, using a parasol is more practical."

"...My, you really do understand quite deeply."

Eruru's face changed, only then did Hisui realize he misspoke.

He was quite knowledgeable in this area already but it would be suspicious if found out. That was why he always tried to avoid letting others know.

"I only heard it from someone by chance. But in terms of tests, isn't a blood test enough? What's with all those cliched procedures?"

"Those are the most effective procedures. The blood test was for understanding your state of health. Once bitten by a vampire, a person's blood gradually decreases in volume and the proportions of all sorts of its makeup changes."

"Then comparing my blood with a vampire's, isn't it all clear?"

"Please shut up, ignorant amateur. A vampire and a human's blood's makeup are completely identical. If you are forced to distinguish them, only occultic means can be used."

Eruru went "hmph" and mocked Hisui's ignorance.

However, Hisui naturally knew this level of knowledge. He feigned ignorance as an amateur to confirm Eruru's side's level of knowledge.

(They realize that a vampire's essence transcends science, huh... no good, this is a real expert.)

Hisui sighed to himself and continued to maintain his expressionless look as he changed the subject.

"...Umm, so that whatever test decided I am human?"

"Exactly. The results prove that you are completely innocent. But as a result, dealing with that vampire must be postponed."

Eruru remarked angrily. Her tone of voice made Hisui realize her true purpose.

This girl was seriously trying to exterminate Rushella.

"...If I had shown even a slight bit of turning into a vampire, what would happen to that girl?"

"Exterminated. That is only logical."

Her tone of voice was saying: what stupid question are you asking?

Behind the cute glasses were a pair of hostile and firmly resolved eyes.

"Taking away human dignity, hateful pests. These are vampires. They are rejected by heaven's mandate. Destroying them is for your own good. If you have not turned completely into a vampire, in a gray zone, then you can still be saved."

"...Conversely, if I turn into a vampire completely, killing her means I'm dead."

Vampire Characteristic #5: when the master vampire is destroyed, a chain reaction causes all the servants to perish as well. In other words, one vampire's death causes all the people they had turned into vampires to all die.

"So what? Rather than letting pests live, why not die as a contribution to the human world? Destroying the boss automatically eliminates the flunkies. Making the pest removal job simple is one of the vampires' few good points."

Eruru's words were completely firm.

If Hisui was a vampire, she would surely kill him on the spot.

As human, she spared him.

In the process of turning, she would help him.

Vampires would be eliminated without exception.

Because it was so simple, her viewpoint was unshakable.

"Isn't the police's job to arrest and investigate suspects? Punishing 'culprits' without a trial, is that really okay?"

"You're talking about human cases. But we are different. Besides, we are only part of the police for the convenience of investigation. Currently, due to the rising number of cases near the capital, we are part of the MPD. If necessary, we can change our names and carry out our mission under a different organization. It is only for cover."

Resistance is futile, we are the organization above the law, sanctioned by the country---That was what her words sounded like.

The petite girl gave off great intimidation, causing Hisui to sigh again and again.

"...I get it. But it's strange. I could be in the process of turning, hence you reserved judgment and did careful tests. But that girl, she's a real vampire. Why didn't you exterminate her? You probably have anti-vampire equipment, right?"

Faced with Hisui's question, Eruru narrowed her eyes.

Even the expressionless Kishida beside her reacted with some emotion.

"I thought you were just a fool enamored by a vampire's beauty, but never expected you to actually have a brain."

"'Never expected' is redundant. So, why is that?"

"...Even vampires, if they do not harm humans, their execution is delayed... because there are fools who believe that. Because they count as humanoid, some believe that. However, this type of humans are probably bitten by vampires or perhaps captives under the influence of the mystic eyes."

"The so-called hardliners and conservatives. Looks like your faction isn't so united after all. In other words, destroying a vampire requires evidence and proper procedures."

Hisui pointed at himself.

Eruru nodded with displeasure.

Should Hisui show the slightest symptom of turning into a vampire, Rushella would have been condemned.

But Hisui was 100% human.

This was something that should be worth celebrating but because Eruru lost a legitimate reason to exterminate a vampire, she seemed quite unhappy.

"So, it's about time you released me right? Just as you proved, I'm completely human."

"Human for now. I want to ask you, human, why keep that pest by your side?"

"She decided to live in my home on her own."

"... I cannot understand. A human and a vampire cannot possibly have a relationship without blood sucking. Clearly you are not controlled by the mystic eyes... Are you infatuated with her appearance?"

"Perhaps. But she only treats me as a servant. After all, she doesn't understand human society, and casually orders me around."

Hisui hid the key point and urged Eruru to release him.

Looks like Mei had not divulged his constitution to Eruru's side. If he said it now he'd probably get taken to be dissected. Hence he remained silent about it and just made up excuses to cover it up.

"I see. So a new purpose was found for trash with no value of blood sucking. You must have it tough."

Adding the final comment, Eruru's eyes did not show the slightest sympathy.

Hisui originally intended to stay silent but could not help himself from mocking her.

"Right, a high school student's life sure is tough. Yeah, a middle school kid's not gonna understand. Ah, or maybe not even middle school?

Elementary schooler... ah, but modern elementary schoolers should be more developed...!?"

Before he finished, Hisui found his view dimming.

Then his forehead crashed against the floor.

Then the back of his head was stepped on viciously by a boot.

The final strike came from Eruru's scolding.

"What did you just say, you trash of a human who has nothing but appearance, totally forgetting a human's dignity?"

"You...!"

Eruru was stepping on his head.

Hisui recalled that by the time he was halfway through what he said, she had stood up.

Then... he couldn't recall any more.

What the heck!?

Suffering a sweeping kick, he had lost balance... something like that. Because the attack was too swift and precise, none of it remained in memory.

Only the tragic fact of reality with his head fallen on the ground.

In such a humiliating pose.

"What are you doing...!?"

"I am on a separate level from trash humans like you. Your stupidity fails to see that you are the same age as me."

"Eh, no way!? I thought at most you're middle school..."

Hisui rudely expressed his opinion, but felt her foot stepping harder. Pressed flat against the hard floor, his mouth could not say anything more.

"Please pay attention to your tone of voice. I have already graduated from university and my physical ability also surpasses you. Hence, that is why I have been hired by the MPD. Got it?"

Eruru spoke as she stepped hard with all her might.

Sucked blood by a vampire, pushed down by an artificial human, kicked by a loli.

All these unfair treatments were happening to him.

The fate of female misfortune, no way.

"How unfortunate is my ordinary life going to get!?"

"Your lazy and plain life is completely worthless before national security."

"That's no fair. As a citizen who pays sales tax, I at least require that I graduate from under this shoe..."

Probably shaken by the sight of Hisui's tears, Eruru finally lifted her foot.

Hisui looked up with difficulty. Due to a sort of fated inevitability, or rather, his perfect position, he clearly saw the interior of the skirt of the girl who had been stepping on him.

"Ah, it's white."

"...!!"

Eruru went bright red in the face and stepped on Hisui's face directly.

"Ouch, what the fuck!? It was unavoidable!!"

"Shut up!! Guys like you who are ruled by lust no matter the situation, I hate the most!!"

"Well I'm really sorry, okay! Seriously, something's entering my nose... shit, it's a nosebleed!"

Although it did not hurt too much, his nose still bled.

Holding his nose, Hisui's hand was dyed red and blood dripped to the floor.

"This is your just deserts..."

Probably because he started to bleed, Eruru was frightened. She murmured softly and took her gaze off Hisui.

"Sheesh man, you're making me look like I got all excited about panties. Hey dude over there, got a tissue?"

Hisui sought Kishida for help but like Eruru, he had turned his face away and acted like he was not concerned.

"Heartless bastard..."

"Hurry and stop the bleeding, okay!?"

Eruru yelled and tossed the tissues to Hisui. Hisui caught it and wiped his hand and the blood around his nose.

"...Has it stopped?"

"Almost."

Although there was a lot of bleeding it quickly stopped. This was due to Hisui's special constitution but naturally, Eruru had no idea.

She frantically opened the window and ventilated the room.

"What a hated smell... if only you were a vampire, I could exterminate you directly..."

"Don't say something so scary..."

"...Anyway, today's evidence gathering is over. However... is it okay for you to return?"

"Huh?"

"You could end up with your blood sucked any time. Are you really fine with returning just like that? If you wish, we can protect you. Until we exerminate that vampire. After all, she will soon bare her fangs towards humans to seek fresh blood."

Eruru spoke with full confidence.

Her sharp eyes showed a sense of pity like looking at a puppy who was locked in a cage with a hungry beast.

However.

"I'm going home."

Hisui said.

Unlike before, he spoke with decisive resolve.

"Why?"

"Do I need a reason for going back to my own home?"

"Do you firmly believe yourself safe? Or perhaps... that vampire made a promise not to suck your blood?"

"What about it?"

"Foolish. Nothing else describes this. I won't even bother with arguing with you. Go, the next time we meet... you might not be human anymore. Then you will be our target for disposal."

Eruru said coldly, a hint of pity in her voice.

"Maybe."

Kishida led the way and Hisui left the room.

After seeing the scenery outside as well as the exterior of the buildings, only then did Hisui believe Eruru's words regarding her organization.

The building he was in was the closest police station: Seidou Police Station.

"You guys really are the police... this world must be coming to an end."

"I'll give you a ride."

Kishida offered. Hisui reluctantly got into the front passenger seat.

"That girl is really hostile against vampires... is there any reason?"

"I don't know the details... Probably a relative is victim? Even without that, she has very strong sense of responsibility towards her mission."

This man looked like the quiet type but unexpectedly answered Hisui's question.

Sitting in the sedan cruising under the night sky, Hisui continued to ask:

"Your department, do they hire vampires?"

"...Why do you ask?"

"Just curious. Since they hire Frankenstein's creatures, right? And you guys seem quite knowledgeable about vampires. See, this is called using poison against poison. Besides, you guys don't exterminate vampires all at once, so that means among vampires, some are more reasonable than others, right? I think perhaps there might be some common ground."

"...You're quite sharp. Indeed, they are dangerous, but that's just like certain humans too. Some are satisfied with blood packs and some even volunteer to help us. However, in accordance to Kariya-sama's wishes, they were all rejected."

"That's really thorough hatred."

Hisui shrugged and Kishida stopped the car, looked at his watch and said:

"Sorry, I still have work to do. I'll drop you off here, is that okay?"

"Sure. It'd be a problem if that girl at home saw me with you."

"I can only ask this of you... please assist us. I'll leave you our contact info. Even Kariya-sama will adhere strictly to procedures and not act rashly. She wants to assure your safety and she worries about you."

"...Even so, she really doesn't act cute at all."

Hisui grumbled and watched Kishida's car leave.

The sky was already dark. This place was not far from home.

What was Rushella doing?

He thought of calling her to ask but unfortunately, Rushella did not have a cellphone.

When buying clothes during the weekend, she had gone "What is this thing!? Humans really use the strangest things!" so he had skipped on buying a cellphone.

Oh well... after all, she should be home a long time ago.

Once he returned, surely she'll start yelling about dinner time.

Expecting annoying things to come wave after wave, Hisui could not help but sigh. At this moment a voice spoke from behind.

"Eh... Kujou-kun?"

"Sera..."

Turning around he found Reina. Seeing her in her uniform, he realized she had not gone home.

"Are you... okay?"

"Huh?"

"In Nichoume's alley... you were forcefully taken away in a car!?"

"You saw it!?"

Hisui could not help but cry out. She witnessed him getting abducted!?

"It was quite far away at the time. I thought I was imagining things or recognized the wrong person.... so I didn't call the police... sorry, but I was still very worried... although you told me your phone number, the call didn't go through..."

"Uh, it's because umm, that. An acquaintance gave me a ride. He seems to be working and was saying fine... then he dragged me away by force. What a savage guy."

"...Really?"

"Really, I'm serious."

"Thank goodness..."

Hisui's gaze wandered when speaking but Reina seemed to believe him. What a pure and innocent child.

Their homes seemed to be in the same direction so they walked side by side.

"Kujou-kun, today... thank you, umm, for during English class."

"What did I do?"

"Umm, when I was called to answer a question and was stuck... you quietly told me the answer, right?"

"Oh~ right, that did happen."

A trivial matter that even the speaker forgot. Yet Reina remembered it clearly. Remembering other people's good deeds, thanking in earnest---she was this kind of noble-minded and virtuous person.

"My only bad subject is English... I'm so envious of you. You always answer so fluently when asked, even your pronunciation sounds so native."

"Well, only my English is relatively better. Because my family traveled the world with me... English was kinda forced into my brain."

"Eh... you're one of those who returned from abroad? Ah, that's the same for Rushella-san too, right?"

"...Yeah."

On the first day of school, Hisui had fabricated a story about Rushella having lived abroad for too long and was not used to Japanese customs... that was the current setting.

After all, Rushella had no memories of her birthplace. Judging from her behavior, it was probably Europe, the homeland of vampires, but no further information was known.

"Although she's a bit strange, she seems to be quite close to you, Kujou-kun? Always eating lunch together..."

"Well, I guess..."

Actually for Hisui, that was for monitoring her actions. But in the classmates' eyes, they seemed to be on intimate terms.

"However, Rushella-san seems so far removed from commoners. It feels so difficult to strike up a conversation with her..."

Indeed, Rushella had kept her distance from the girls in the class.

Spearheaded by Reina, some of the friendly girls in the class wanted to proactively approach and interact with Rushella but it did not go too well.

In this regard, as a fellow supernatural entity, Mei had no problems with socializing.

Probably because she entered school for making babies, she had no interest in girls. But since becoming 'human' was her kind's highest goal, they would try to get along with humans.

Not particularly close friends with anyone but she would always smile no matter whom she was facing.

"Rushella-san... somehow she looks very sad sometimes. Did something happen?"

"...Because she left her homeland and is now in a foreign place? She's probably troubled about that."

Indeed... she was probably troubled.

Because she had no memories, she looked so lonely and fragile sometimes.

That was why she desired a servant devoted to her unconditionally. But as fate would have it, she picked a mutant who could not become her servant when his blood was sucked.

But bound by the ancient rituals of vampires, she could not go find another target.

How unlucky and pitiful, perhaps...

While Hisui was thinking, he suddenly felt Reina vanish from his side.

A black shadow covered her.

"Eh...?"

Hisui found the situation strange and looked towards Reina.

She could no longer be seen. There were numerous birds flying in front of him, blocking his view.

The flock of birds flying in formation, as well as the gradually growing stench of blood, these caused Hisui to become aware of a certain existence.

A vampire was here.

Using birds instead of bats which were synonymous with vampires, it looked less surreal.

If they were able to control birds on the street like this, probably most vampires would pick this type of bird.

"Get away!!"

Hisui swung his school bag to disperse the birds. They instantly scattered, leaving Hisui's view.

But the sight caused him to despair.

A reeking stench of blood.

The streetlight was like a spotlight, making Reina's figure stand out from the darkness.

There was a black shadow hugging her from behind. Although Reina was blocking the view and Hisui only saw a vague outline, he still understood the identity of the shadow.

That was a vampire.

He had finished his meal. Reina's neck had the mark of two fangs.

"You...!!"

Hisui stepped forward, the eyes of the one who had sucked Reina's blood shot red light.

The mystic eyes, unique to vampires, pierced Hisui.

But due to his constitution rendering it ineffective, Hisui merely paused then quickly continued running forward.

At the same time, the figure melded into the darkness behind Reina, vanishing without trace into the night.

Hisui frantically caught up and extended his hand towards Reina who was falling.

Luckily he caught her before she struck the ground. She lay helplessly in his bosom.

"Hey, are you okay...!?"

Reina did not answer. Her only external wound was the neck but her entire body was pale from a lack of blood, as though in a temporary state of anemia.

A great amount of blood was sucked---in other words, the degree of vampirization was severe.

The girl who was chatting and smiling normally just now had turned into an alien existence in the blink of an eye.

A beginning high school life was stained by a horrible red color.

Hisui felt a black emotions burning inside himself.

Gnashing his teeth, he looked up to see a familiar face.

"You...!"

Rushella was standing there.

Her right hand was holding a short sword dripping with blood.

Bright red liquid dripped from the side of her lip.

Even her breathing was irregular. She was panting hard.

Could it be her?

Hisui did not say it. He was afraid to say it.

Rushella simply stood there expressionlessly.

In this awkward silence, Reina reached out weakly. Her slender fingers trembled but distinctly pointed to Rushella.

"...What's the matter?"

Hisui asked. Reina answered softly.

"That... girl."

"...!?"

"Sucked... my... blood... it's... her..."

Saying that, Reina fainted again, as though having drawn her last breath. Her slender arm also dangled powerlessly towards the ground.

Hisui silently looked at Rushella.

Just now what Reina had said, Rushella should have heard it.

Hisui wanted to know how she would react.

But Rushella had turned away, covering her mouth.

"Hey...!"

Rushella did not heed Hisui's calls and left on her own.

Only the classmate's body weight pressed down on his arms.

His mind spun around with thoughts he did not wish to think about.

The only thing Hisui could do was call Kishida whom he became acquainted with just now.

Kishida hurried over and arranged for Reina to be delivered to a hospital. Then Hisui was taken back to the police station to give a simple eyewitness account.

After all procedures were over, Hisui was permitted to go home, it was already close to dawn.

Due to lack of sleep, he walked unsteadily home. It was already time for school, but Rushella was not home.

Although he had many things he wanted to say, his brain was already on strike. Hisui had no choice but to go to his room and lie on the bed.

"...Did you... suck blood...?"

Unable to tell if these were whispers or dream speak, Hisui's consciousness sank into darkness.

Chapter 5 - Suspicious Kiss

"Why must I bare my skin before others?"

Rushella grumbled, she was bothered by the surrounding gazes.

After finishing the cleanup during lunch, Rushella went to the infirmary.

Today was the physical examination.

Before entering the room, all the students had to wear gym clothes but after arriving at the infirmary, most people had taken them off, only leaving underwear.

Because their bodies were exposed to others during the examination, everyone was concerned and especially chose their underwear with care. The various fabrics covering the girls' bodies were truly a colorful sight.

Although the physical examination's purpose was to measure, height, weight and sitting height, most girls would take the opportunity to take out the measure tapes and record their three sizes.

Gathered into groups, friends measured one another's bust and hips.

"What are they so happy about......?"

"Oh dear, are you really not planning to measure yourself?"

Someone behind her suddenly pulled off Rushella's t-shirt.

Clad in white lace, two fruits came tumbling out.

"Wha......"

"Wow, those breasts are really huge. Between us, we have a draw? No... You're slightly ahead!?"

Hands reached out from behind to grope and squeeze boldly. Rushella went red in the face and turned around, yelling angrily:

"Y-You bitch......!!"

"These are F-cups infinitely approaching Gs huh... No, they've probably broke through the G barrier. Massive puppies, these things."

Mei smiled at her formidable rival.

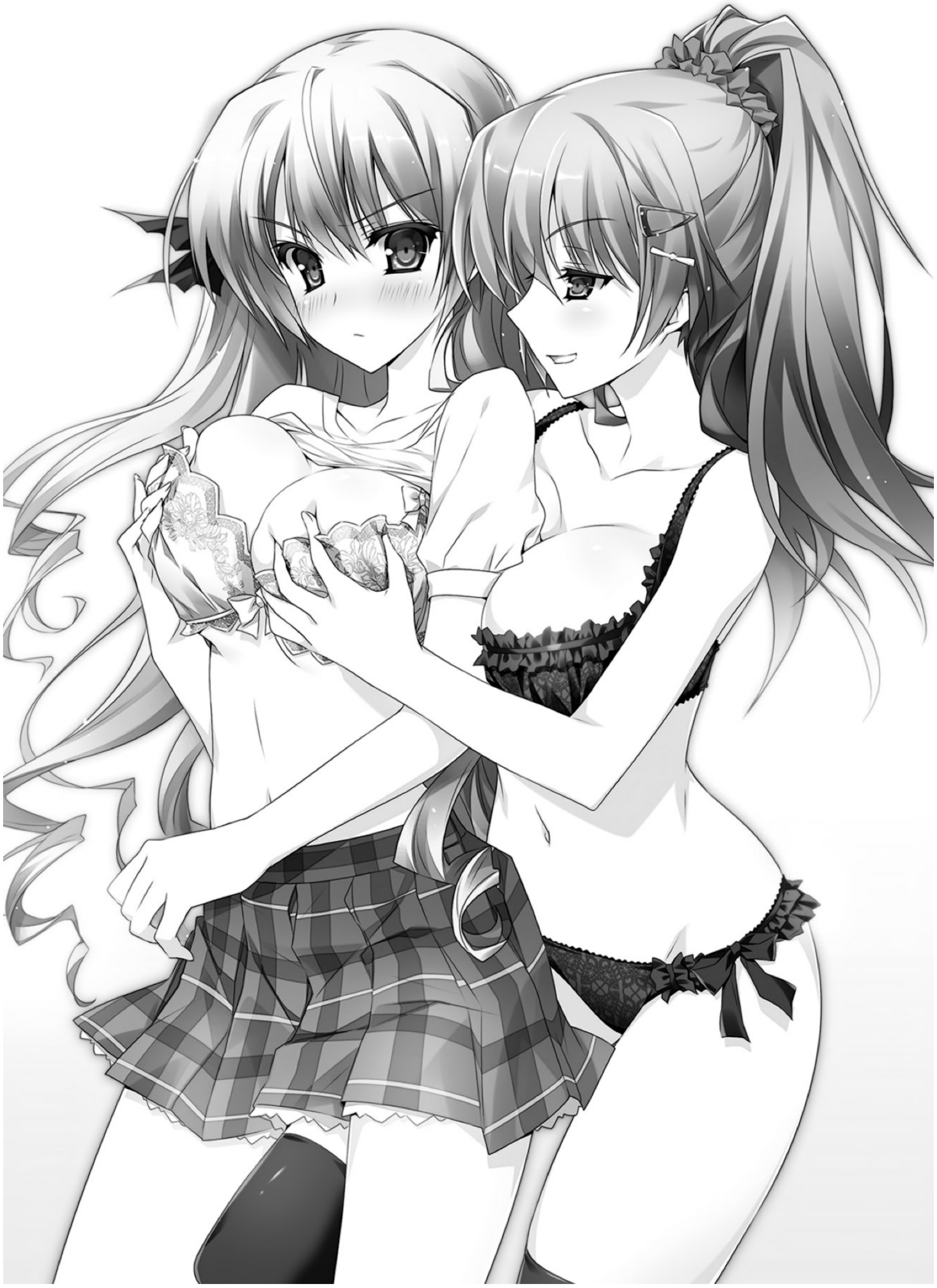
She had already removed her own gym clothes and was only in underwear. Completely not embarrassed. Her skimpy punk underwear's design was quite salacious for a first-year high school student.

"Y-You bitch, what are you doing so suddenly!?"

"Doing what? ...I was only wondering if I should help you measure. By the way, your bra is a bit tight. Since Hi-kun accompanied you to buy them, why didn't you get proper measurements before buying?"

"B-Because, I don't quite get it, anyway I just bought some cute ones first..."

"What a waste of a shopping date. Just ask the shop staff to help you measure. Aren't you too ignorant in the ways of the world?"



"You're being noisy! Anyway, I don't need your help!!"

"If you wear ill-fitting bras, the shape will get ruined, you know? If you still want to wear those kinds of clothes with revealing necklines like the dress you wore on your first day, I'd advise you to pay a bit more attention, okay?"

"Ooh......"

Mei made a fair point. Rushella fell silent, unable to find a rebuttal. Even without memories, she could tell that Mei's experience as a woman was far superior to hers.

"Hi-kun is such a poor dear. To think he would be accompanied by a girl who is this ignorant about staying presentable. Perhaps Hi-kun's own standards of appearance might get dragged down a lot."

"......Grrrr."

The mentioning of Hisui's name caused Rushella to change her expression immediately.

"After all, my three sizes are measured already, I don't mind if I leave straight away... How about you?"

Mei smiled with full composure.

Rushella hesitated for a long while then finally sought help from the enemy.

"...Help me, measure."

"There you go, a nice and obedient kid. Then let's get this over with quickly.

Mei's experienced hands unrolled the measuring tape and measured Rushella's body.

"Just as expected, your bust exceeds the 90cm domain...... Waist is... Wow, even narrower than mine......"

"What's the matter?"

"N-Nothing! Hips...... Seems smaller than mine. I guess I should be glad huh... Hey, is Hi-kun a boobs worshiper or an ass kind of guy? For making babies, I suppose my childbearing hips are sufficient?"

"...No idea. Why do I need to know that guy's tastes......"

"Oh dear, is that so? Then that means you don't know why Hi-kun is absent from school today? Right right... I've also heard that the class rep is absent too. Did you know the reason?"

"......No idea. That guy didn't come home last night."

"Mm~hm... He's not well? Isn't that because you keep sucking his blood every day?"

"Well......"

Rushella looked down and could not speak. After all, she knew very well that losing blood burdened the human body.

"...I don't drink that much in a day. At least he's not in any risk of dying?"

"But it adds up every day, right? Although Hi-kun is always so easygoing, it's actually quite tough for him, right?"

"That guy's lazy to begin with..."

Although Rushella retorted insistently, her tone of voice was much weaker than usual.

Mei did not bother with the argument and cut straight to the chase.

"Oh well whatever. By the way, your three sizes are measured... Next, when we switch with the boys and do the dental and medical examinations, it'd be best if you could examine me... After all, given our identities, it's quite troublesome."

"That's true... My body's structure is different from humans."

"I should be fine with the dental, but the medical on the other hand... If I run into an experienced internist, it could get very risky. You probably have a problem with both, but dental will be the bigger issue. The length of your fangs are sure to draw attention."

"It's much shorter than when sucking blood, but a commotion would still be troublesome. Okay, time to use the mystic eyes to get through this!"

"Could you also hypnotize 'everything normal' for my checkup? As your reward... I'll help you do the dental examination. It'd be a problem if your prided fangs caused an issue, right?"

Mei smiled in a considerate manner.

Rushella did not notice her ulterior motives.

"Hah, looks like you're finally showing respect towards a 'True Ancestor.' Very well, go ahead and feel very honored."

"...Yes yes. By the way, how about I help you with some teeth cleaning? Let those prided teeth shine with radiance?"

Mei smiled tenderly and took out a paper cup filled with a white and sticky liquid. Then she stirred it up with disposable chopsticks.

"Teeth cleaning...? You mean brushing teeth? If it makes the teeth prettier, go ahead."

"...Okay, come, open your mouth."

"Yes. Ah—"

Rushella opened her mouth wide.

Mei instantly poured the contents of the paper cup inside.

Some of the liquid splashed and even made Rushella's face white.

"(What is this!?)"

"Relax, it's harmless. It'll solidify instantly in your mouth... Then the stains on the teeth will stick to it. Once removed, your teeth will shine brightly. Come, bite down firmly~~"

"Really...? Why does it taste so bitter... And so sticky."

Rushella felt the liquid solidifying slowly in her mouth. It felt similar to that 'chewing gum' she tried recently. Rushella did not like gum already but this sticky feeling in her mouth was even worse.

"Great, it's okay now— Open wide, don't damage the shape when I'm taking it out."

Rushella frowned and spat out the rubbery substance.

Her teeth was clearly imprinted on it. Mei carefully placed it into a plastic bag that resembled those used for handling criminal evidence.

"...Is this done? How are the teeth?"

Rushella wiped her mouth but there was still some dried-up stains of the white liquid on her face. Even her tongue still had traces of the white and opaque liquid. Her noble face was filled with displeasure.

Putting on an act, Mei handed her a tissue and told her the results of the "dental examination."

"Yeah, aha, right... Nice and white, isn't it? No problems. Right, go and rinse your mouth? Then head over to the gym and handle the internist and dentist for me, okay❤"

"...I know. My mouth feels terrible... And this sticky stuff on my face..."

Rushella adjusted her messed up clothes and exited the infirmary to rinse her mouth.

Watching her leave, Mei then looked at the bag in her hand and smiled with satisfaction.

"Got it❤"

"...So that's how it went, mission accomplished!"

"Thank you for your efforts, Ms. Informer."

During the break after the physical examination, Hisui was talking to Mei.

"That's so rude~ This is work, I repeat, work. I only reported to the police that a vampire had sneaked into the high school here. I should be commended for such behavior, right?"

"Thanks to you, I got dragged into it as well. I ran into so many troublesome things~~"

Hisui found it hard to accept what had happened yesterday. Combined with a lack of sleep, his mood was hitting lows.

"What does it matter? At least it proves that you're completely human, Hi-kun."

"I'm human already, I don't need proof of that. Whether my blood is sucked or not, I'm not affected. But I hope you haven't disclosed about my constitution, have you?"

Hisui was verifying the questions arising during the "examination" and Mei nodded.

"No I didn't. Besides, I still find your constitution quite unbelievable. It's impossible, being bitten by a vampire yet remaining fine."

"My blood becomes less, that's not completely fine... Anyway, thank you for that. If you disclosed it, I'll probably be taken away and dissected. That Eruru girl's style of doing things is completely unlike her name. Who knows what could happen."

Recalling his unfair treatment last night, Hisui face-palmed and shook his head.

Treated like that simply because he was living with a vampire. Had he turned completely into a vampire, that girl would surely have shown no mercy.

"Ah~ That's right, although she's really cute in appearance, she's quite merciless against supernatural creatures, especially vampires."

"...Why on earth is that?"

Hisui recalled his doubts from yesterday and muttered to himself. Although he did not know how outstanding her abilities were, her arrogant attitude and coldness towards vampires were highly unusual. He felt an almost fanatic obsession.

"But she's very into her work and gets results. Since you're worried about the class rep, wouldn't it be best to let her handle things?"

"...Currently, I can't trust those people."

Hisui spoke, very displeased.

Mei's operation today was due to Hisui accepting Eruru's mission the night before.

As the first witness of the incident, Hisui was taken to the police station to record his testimony after he called the police.

"Getting the bad stuff out of the way first, we do consider the vampire who lives with you as the prime suspect. When the victim fainted, she indicated 'Rushella' as the culprit. Didn't you hear her?"

"...I heard it."

Hisui did not feign ignorance. After all, the police already knew about it so there was no point in lying.

"Then I'll be upfront. Looks like you've realized your own stupidity, right? Because you left a vampire alone in this case, you're partly responsible."

"...What do you want me to do?"

"We hope you can assist the investigation. To exterminate that vampire, evidence is needed first. In other words, it needs to be rigorously proven that she did attack the victim."

"You want me to find proof of absence or gather fingerprints?"

"You're half right. What I want you to do is gather teeth marks."

"What's that?"

"Like humans, vampire's teeth have minor differences in their shapes. If the bite mark on the victim matches the teeth marks you gathered, then the vampire's guilt is confirmed. We'll prepare the tools for you and Sudou Mei will assist you. Go and gather her teeth marks."

—After explaining that, she had allowed Hisui to return home.

He had gone to school in the afternoon, met up with Mei who was already informed, then things happened as previously narrated.

Next, the teeth marks were to be handed to Eruru then their task was done.

"You look quite unhappy, Hi-kun. Are you that unwilling to suspect Rushella? I found her strange from the start. Insisting on calling herself 'True Ancestor' or whatever... After I told Kishida-san, he laughed, you know? That poker faced man."

"Hmm... Hold on, you also reported about that girl calling herself a 'True Ancestor'?"

"...? I reported it, yeah. Eruru-chan hopes we can provide as much detailed information as possible. But I don't think she really cares about that claim."

"...I see."

Hisui looked at the photos Mei had borrowed as investigation materials.

Mei poked her head over and frowned after looking at the photo.

"Wow... That's the blown up photo of the bite mark on the class rep? What a horrible wound......"

"I've seen many vampire victims before... But this counts as the most serious case. Almost on the verge of turning into a complete vampire. Quite a lot of blood was sucked in one go."

"Is this type very rare?"

"In order to turn a human into a vampire, the person's blood needs to be drained completely. Blood occupies 8% of a person's mass. Because the class rep is more slender than average, her mass probably doesn't even reach 50kg. Calculating from that, her blood is roughly 4L. Drinking this amount in a short amount time is quite a tall task even for a vampire. Vampires usually drain their victim's total blood over several nights, not only due to principles or rules, but also more importantly because drinking it all at once is too hard."

"Perhaps you're right... However, the body produces blood every day, right? If a period of time passes, won't the blood be replenished? Then what?"

"What I mean by 'total blood' is conceptually speaking. As an analogy, it's like the total amount of the 'soul.' Kinda like someone's HP bar in a game. Anyway, it's the accumulated amount of blood that needs to be drained from a human to complete the vampire transformation process. For a human's whose total blood is 4L, it can be done at once or in multiple goes. All it takes is 4L total. The replenishment from metabolism doesn't matter. Blood sucking is actually just a ritual. Compared to the actual blood situation, satisfying conceptual conditions is more important."

Hisui's continuous stream of knowledge was quite convincing. And some of the content was bringing them close to the core of the unknown vampire that Mei did not know.

"This vampire... It's possible that he might be quite thirsty, but in that case, there wouldn't be a single drop of blood left in the class rep. I think it goes beyond the matter of turning into a vampire. She would have been drained to death directly. Besides, if the vampire only sought blood, there should be more victims. In that case, I should have been attacked to. So—"

"So?"

"For some particular reason, the culprit deliberately sucked a great deal of blood from the class rep. To the point just before turning her into a vampire completely. What exactly is that guy planning...?"

The smell of a conspiracy made Hisui think deeply.

"...The way I see it, judging from your tone of voice, you're just trying to clear Rushella from suspicion?"

"The method of blood sucking doesn't fit her style, that's the truth. Having been bitten by her, I know very well."

"But what about the victim's testimony? Even if the teeth marks are not compared, isn't that evidence enough?"

"Perhaps."

Hisui spoke blankly. Mei shrugged.

"Oh well whatever, this teeth mark sample, I'll deliver it over. A conclusion should result today."

"That thing... You used that tool that Kariya gave for obtaining teeth marks?"

"Yeah, it's an improved version of what dentists use. A special super fast drying resin. It probably will solidify completely in a little while."

"...I see."

Hisui closed his eyes and thought for a moment, then suggested.

"Ah, let me take it over actually. It's the police station, right?"

"Yeah... Why?"

"I have something I need to confirm. Before sunset."

"You're thinking of going now!? What about the afternoon lessons?"

"I'm taking today off. The teachers don't even know I came to school... Just make up any old reason."

Saying that Hisui took care to avoid being seen and made his way to the school gates.

"Why are you here?"

Eruru's first sentence was full of annoyance.

Naturally, Hisui was not particularly friendly either.

"I came to deliver what you demanded."

Hisui raised the police evidence labeled plastic bag before her eyes and said. It was already dusk and the setting sun was making long stretched out shadows for them.

"In that case, just wait at the reception in the station. Why did you deliberately run to the benches outside?"

Just as Eruru described, Hisui ran out outdoors as soon as he told reception to inform Eruru.

"I want to feel the breeze outside. Staying in that building makes me uncomfortable."

"No one needs your comments. Hurry and give me that thing."

Eruru reached out and urged Hisui to hand the teeth impressions over.

But Hisui ignored her and standing in the same spot with his back towards the setting sun, he made a demand.

"Of course I'll give you this, but there's a condition."

"What condition? You actually want money? How shameless..."

"Can I visit her?"

"...?"

"The class rep must have been moved here, right?"

Hisui looked towards the white-walled building next to the police station.

It was one of the few comprehensive hospitals in the area. Built in this location, it was probably quite intimately related to the police.

"...You are quite observant. Whether you are dense or sharp... I really cannot tell sometimes."

"It's obvious with just a little thinking. So, what's your answer? Just a quick visit should be fine, right?"

"...Okay. Follow me."

Hisui followed Eruru and headed towards Seidou Comprehensive Hospital.

Passing through security card checkpoints and retinal scans, the two went underground.

Victims bitten by vampires would inherit the characteristics of vampires and fear light. Reina was probably kept underground to avoid suffering additional damage.

Finally, Hisui and Eruru arrived at the destination. This floor was the same as the facilities above ground, giving a clean, white image. And also because it was underground, there was an even more oppressive feeling from the surrounding walls.

The facility's goal was not treatment but isolation. That's what the environment seemed to make one think.

"We have arrived."

Eruru stopped walking.

The two of them were in a room with various medical equipment, like an intensive care unit. They were hooked up to the sleeping girl in the bed, converting her breathing, metabolism and especially the state of her blood into numerical values.

Perhaps to an ignorant observer, this was just a sickroom. However, seeing the girl tied to the bed with various restraints, this clearly seemed more like a prison.

The girl with the deathly pale face was Reina indeed.

When Hisui approached her, Reina suddenly opened her eyes.

"Kujou-kun...?"

"Hi."

Hisui raised his hand and greeted.

Reina stared at him with hollow eyes and then surveyed her surroundings.

She seemed to be as yet unclear of her situation. Her eyes kept wandering.

Her state was common in vampire victims, a hazy consciousness. She probably woke up multiple times earlier but her memories probably stopped at that night.

"How do you feel?"

Hisui sounded like a doctor. Reina simply answered in a hoarse voice.

"It feels like, so thirsty..."

"Let me buy you some juice, how's that?"

Hisui said this typical patient-visit-dialogue and approached Reina even closer.

Reina was almost close enough to touch his neck.

"What would you like a drink?"

"..."

The instant Hisui asked this question, Reina's eyes faintly shone with crimson light.

She spread her parched lips and revealed clean, white, healthy teeth.

Among them, the canines were particularly long.

"What I want to drink, is..."

Only Reina's head was mobile. Hisui did not move.

"Get away!"

Eruru snarled angrily and forcefully grabbed Hisui's arm, pulling him away from Reina.

At the same time, the crimson light faded from Reina's eyes as though she was drugged and she went to sleep with peaceful breathing.

"Are you mad!? Did you actually want her to drink your blood!?"

Eruru said coldly. Pointing her gun at Hisui's forehead without hesitation.

Unlike the police's standard issue S&W M3913 or the SIG Sauer P230JP, this gun had an elegant design and was silver all over.

It was covered with decorative patterns of angel's wings and cross motifs. Clearly custom made. The muzzle almost looked as though it fired lasers instead of bullets. As a lethal weapon, its design was quite intricate.

"What's that... Where did you draw it out from!?"

"This is the sacred gun, 'Argentum.' Normally used against vampires but also works on humans. But rather than silver bullets, you probably prefer eating lead."

Seeing Eruru move her finger to the trigger, Hisui raised his arms and surrendered, his face gone pale.

"I only asked if she were thirsty, okay? Even if the class rep drank my blood, what does it matter? As an incomplete vampire, she doesn't have the power to make people vampires through her bite, right?"

As soon as Hisui finished, the gun smacked him on the forehead. Probably intended to handle close combat with vampires as well, the gun's body was built quite sturdy. A smack on the head hurt quite a bit.

"What are you doing!?"

"You deserve it. Have you ever thought about if she turns back to human and recalls herself drinking someone else's blood, how she would feel!?"

"..."

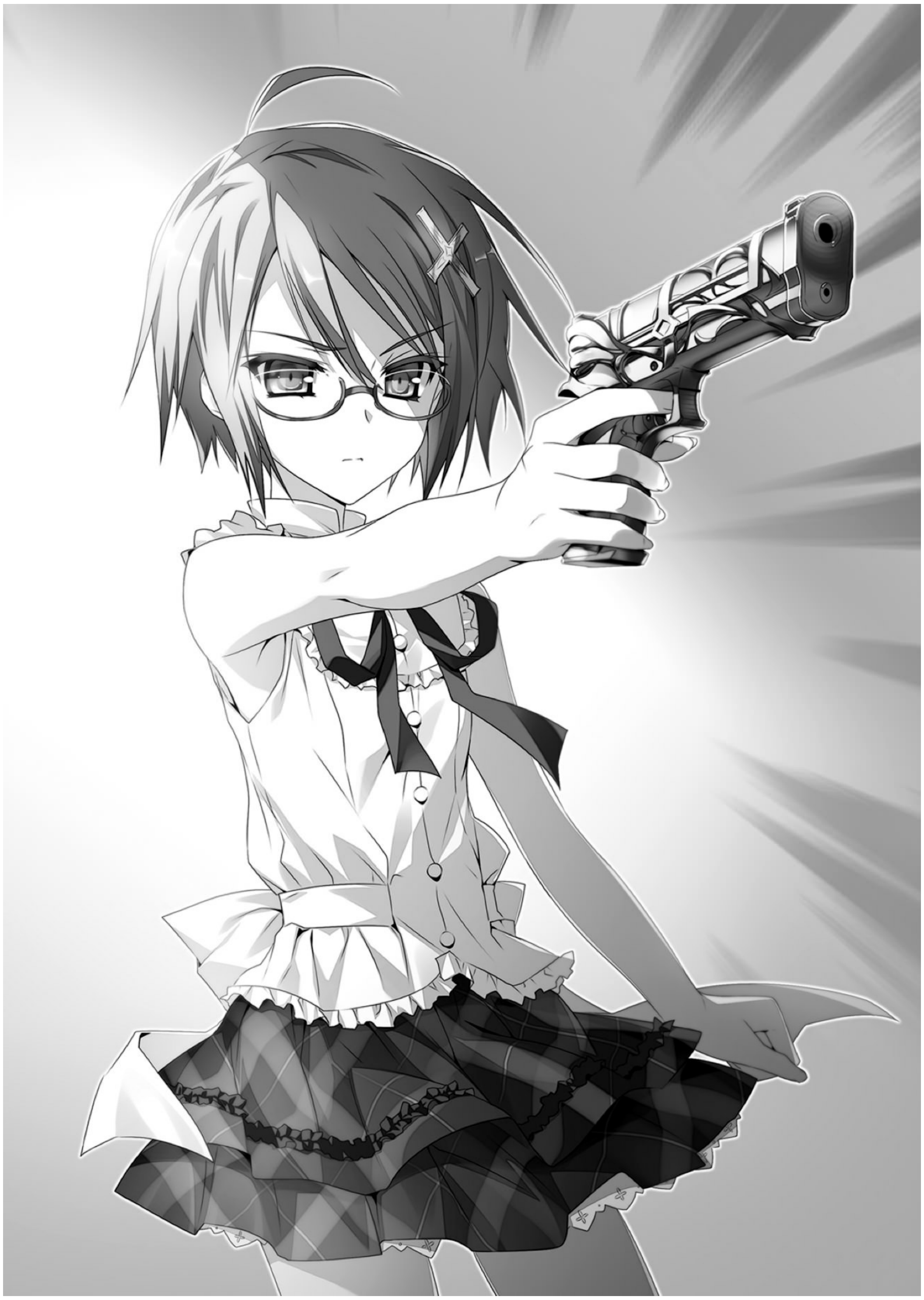
"After bitten by a vampire, the issue is not as simple as turning into a vampire. More importantly, human dignity is infringed. Do not act rashly with your half-assed knowledge!!"

Roaring with hatred and anger, Eruru pointed at the sleeping Reina again.

Vampire Characteristic #6: once bitten by a vampire, as the vampirization process progresses, the victim will show loyalty to the master vampire and gradually turn into something like a vampire.

Reina's restraints were not only for protecting her but also to guard against her own dangerousness.

"I brought you here to let you see how pitiful she looks. No matter what theory you would like to advocate, this is a vampire's true nature. They suck blood and harm people. Even a person like you can understand that somewhat, right!?"



Hisui could not refute and looked towards the shelves at the head of the bed.

That was probably where Reina's personal items were kept.

"This... is the class rep's?"

Hisui held a cross shining with noble radiance in his hand. It looked quite high-class and not a simple trinket. He could also feel the holiness emanating from it.

"...Yes. Her whole family is reported to be devout Christians. She also went to a Catholic middle school and attended church on Sundays. The parents are not home due to the church's work. According to records, they can only return after they finish handling their work."

"Clearly such a pious family, but why didn't God protect her?"

"If she had worn the cross on her neck at the time, she might have been spared. But that's how vampire attacks work. Whether pious saints or sinful women, once bitten they all fall and become inhuman monsters. This is the most terrifying disease in the world, treating everyone equal."

"I see."

Hisui pinched Eruru's cheek hard.

"...What are you doing?"

"This is payback."

"Are you a kid?"

"Lemme ask you a question. To you, what is a vampire?"

"...? Pests that everyone must exterminate. Haven't I said it already?"

"Another question, if it's one of those high-ranking members of the 'Pure'? Or even higher... A 'True Ancestor'?"

"All the same. That simply increases their threat. We will raise the alert and exterminate them more thoroughly. However, I do not believe that kind of thing still exists in this age. Pureblooded members of the 'Pure', at most one or two, 'True Ancestors', all the more impossible."

"I see. I get it. Okay, here you go."

Hisui tossed the teeth impressions to Eruru.

"Thanks. The analysis results will be out very soon. You can go reflect on your own actions."

Hisui did not answer but gazed at his fingers that had just pinched Eruru's cheek.

"You should understand more or less. That vampire by your side is just a bloodsucking monster. Hurry and leave her. No matter what choice you make I will deal with her."

"Thanks. Then could you lead me out? I can't exit alone."

"Still giving trouble even at the end. Fine, let's go."

Following Eruru, Hisui left the building and went on his way home.

After Hisui left, Eruru instantly summoned Kishida and handed the teeth impressions to him.

"The mold has arrived. Analyze it immediately."

"Understood. Once determined, I'll report to you."

"I know. Also, go down there and prepare anti-vampire combat equipment and troops. Capture not needed, just exterminate directly. It finishes tonight."

Kishida inquired of his merciless boss.

"But special consultant, the results are not yet—"

"The analysis was redundant to begin with. The higher-ups... No, this is a more convenient way to shut the mouths of those people who keep crying about coexistence with vampires and researching immortality. The end result does not matter. Anyway, hurry and prepare. I do not want to lose initiative."

The girl delivered a cruel message with an adorable voice.

The loyal right hand man did not say anymore and simply bowed his head and followed orders.

"Understood. Then I will start the analysis and prepare the team."

Kishida left and Eruru sat down at the desk in her office. This was where he had interrogated Hisui last time.

The punctual adjutant will surely finish preparations swiftly.

"...!?"

Eruru suddenly coughed and wheezed. She frantically covered her mouth.

While panting, she searched the drawer by her side and took out a small bottle filled with tablets.

Trembling, she poured out several tablets, placed them in her mouth, chewed them and swallowed.

The coughing persisted a while longer then her body finally calmed down. Eruru breathed out deeply.

Her cute face showed fatigue like a severely ill patient, filled with deep chagrin.

Biting her little lip, Eruru murmured like a curse.

"Destroy... Vampires, leave them all to me. All of them... I will destroy you all."

After "visiting" Reina, Hisui returned home. Rushella was standing at the door.

No matter how you looked at it, she must have waited for him.

The two had not seen each other for a day and felt embarrassed. Silently standing face to face without moving, Rushella finally spoke up first.

"You're back really late. Where did you go...?"

"Hmm~~ There was something to do."

"I don't suppose you went to shack up with that fake woman called Sudou, right!?"

"You're really acting like an old father with strict curfews. It's not like you're Miraluka."

As soon as he said that, Hisui knew he misspoke.

But it was too late, Rushella stepped forward like an arrow and interrogated.

"Who is Miraluka!?"

"Are you a vengeful wife interrogating a husband for affairs? You want to scold her for being a thieving cat?"

"Stop mocking me. Hurry... Tell me. Is that... the woman who raised you?"

Seeing Rushella's sincere gaze, Hisui gave up on arguing. Unhappily scratching his head, he finally nodded.

"...Yeah. I don't know her last name. Her first name was Miraluka."

"That woman... told you lots of stuff?"

"...She only played the role of a mother. But she had long passed the age to be my mother. Basically an old hag. But she gets mad if I say that, insisting 'at least call me Onee-sama.'"

Despite his displeasure, Hisui could not hide the emotions in his voice.

Acting as a mother, age older than a grandma, but looking like an older sister. A vampire like that.

What kind of relationship it was, Hisui himself did not know.

Perhaps family—This would capture their relationship best.

Hence, whenever he referred to her, Hisui used that word.

She is my family.

Seeing the look in Hisui's eyes as he reminisced, Rushella ordered unhappily:

"Hurry... Enter. Then make dinner. I haven't... eaten all this time."

"Yeah yeah... Why are you so particular about food when you don't even need it for nutrition?"

Hisui made a wry look and changed into casual clothing, put on an apron and went to the kitchen.

Tonight's menu was rice, miso soup, roasted fish and pickled vegetables. A pure Japanese style meal.

After cooking, the two had their meal in the living room.

Rushella was not used to chopsticks in the beginning but she had almost mastered them by now.

They started out eating silently but Rushella timidly spoke up.

"You... have something to say, right?"

"Huh?"

"Then hurry and say it. I will answer."

Rushella spoke and turned her head to the side.

After pausing a while. Hisui asked the question he could not ask last night:

"Did you... suck the class rep's blood?"

Rushella shook her head but grumbled worriedly at the same time.

"...I dunno."

"You dunno? ...What do you mean, you dunno?"

"Because I didn't drink any blood yesterday, I was thirsting for it. But... I should have been able to endure it."

"Should? Don't you know your own body well?"

"I don't, know... I don't feel the thirst right now, maybe it's... because I drank the class rep's blood, perhaps..."

"Say, even if that's the case, whether you drank or not, you should remember..."

Halfway through, Hisui suddenly remembered what Rushella tried to express.

Memories—These were quite ambiguous to her in the first place.

She did not even know who she was.

"That night, I heard a girl screaming. My instincts told me someone was attacked by my kind. So I hurried over to the sound—Should be like that. But I'm not too confident..."

"Even if you lost your memory, you should still recall recent events, right?"

"...Yeah, but, I did feel a thirst at the time. At least, that girl collapsed on the ground... The fragrance of blood attracted me. I thought about sucking her blood, if you hadn't appeared then... I probably would have attacked her directly."

"..."

"I'm very afraid sometimes."

"Afraid of what...?"

"Afraid of myself when I thirst for fresh blood... Afraid I will turn into another person. If the 'thirst' cannot be stopped, maybe I might attack people on sight without thinking... This feeling is very scary."

The periodic thirst for blood—A basic instinct that no vampire could escape.

The interval between bouts of such thirst varied massively between individuals, but they had a common point—when the thirst for blood hit a max, they lose their rationality and degenerate into mere beasts.

"So... Sometimes I'm afraid. Thinking if I can't suck blood for long periods of time, what might happen. Will I become a different person, become... just a monster who knows nothing except sucking blood, like that Mei said, even worse than a mosquito."

"..."

"I've been thinking. Why do I have no memories? Perhaps, maybe... Something happened in the past. Maybe thirsting for fresh blood... I became a beast. Perhaps I turned into another person. Therefore, therefore... The current me, will something happen? Then I'll disappear, I'm always thinking of that..."

So everything was so hazy and disturbing.

Fear of a vampire's basic instinct and the loss of memories—burdened by these two stresses, Rushella frowned in self-mockery and hugged herself tight.

"So... I dunno. Maybe I drank the class rep's blood. Just like before, perhaps... I forgot after I drank it..."

Rushella's voice grew increasingly soft as she curled herself into a ball.

No matter how you looked, her fragile appearance did not look like a member of the race that ruled the night like kings since ancient times.

The fragile heart of puberty was a very frail and weak existence.

No matter what her actual age was, her mental age was the same as her appearance. This girl currently shouldered a heavy darkness on her own.

"That night... I think there was a trace of blood on your lips. But I never could figure out, why was there blood on the short sword as well? If you're sucking the class rep's blood, you don't need to use a weapon, right? Unarmed is enough, plus there's the mystic eyes. Then why?"

"I don't wanna say."

Rushella was reluctant to speak for some reason and turned her head to the side.

"Why? This involves your innocence, you know!?"

"......"

Rushella avoided eye contact and remained silent.

Hisui continued to stare at her relentlessly.

Finally, Rushella gave in and spoke gloomily.

"I was... practicing."

"Huh?"

"I was practicing sucking blood."

"HUHHHHHHHH!?"

Hisui stared with his eyes wide in surprise. Rushella blushed and said softly.

"It's because you said I sucked blood too clumsily, so... So I went to the butcher's to buy a hunk of meat as similar to human as possible, with relatively more blood..."

"Then you cut the meat into a suitable size and bit... Is that what you mean by practicing sucking blood?"

Rushella nodded with her face bright red.

Hisui clutched his sides, desperately trying to suppress his laughter.

"Hey, no way!? Practicing... Blood sucking practice! What the heck, that's unheard of in vampires! And going to the butcher's shop! Eh, what was it, pork or beef? So that's why you had blood on your lips and sword!?"

"You're being really annoying!! That's why I didn't want to say it..."

Rushella was so embarrassed she was almost about to cry. Her tiny fists hammering Hisui's body.

Hisui laughed even harder, rolling on the floor clutching his stomach.

"Gimme a break... I was stuck thinking about it all day, how silly of me..."

"You're being noisy, hurry and shut up!!"

Rushella's mood was very bad and she pouted unhappily.

Hisui finally managed to stop his laughter and asked again:

"...Why did you want to practice?"

"I said already. Because you said I am clumsy."

Rushella still looked cross and did not want to face Hisui.

"Umm, say..."

"Not drinking blood is out of the question. However... At least it's better if you don't hurt when I'm drinking, right? And I do control how much I drink..."

Hearing Rushella's delicate voice, Hisui scratched his head awkwardly.

"Then... What do you think?"

It was Rushella's turn to ask. She had explained her situation completely.

Then what did Hisui think of her?

"Do you think... I would break my promise with you and suck other people's blood casually?"

Rushella whispered, slowly approaching Hisui's face.

Hisui could not answer immediately. Then he prepared to speak.

Just as Rushella was waiting for his answer. The sound of a car stopping and many people's footsteps were heard at the entrance.

"What now, visitors at this time?"

"...You wait here, don't go out."

Hisui's face was serious. Ordering Rushella to stay in the living room, he walked out by himself.

Exiting the house, he found uniformed police tactical unit lined up in the garden outside.

Dressed in smart-looking heavy protective gear around their necks, clearly they were designed to guard against vampires.

Very likely, all the materials used in their uniforms were made of strong fibers to resist vampire teeth.

Outside the yard, signs of an armored van could be seen. Several searchlights were directed towards Hisui's surroundings, lighting up the night sky as bright as day, leaving nowhere for the target to hide.

"Good evening, Kujou-san." The leader of the troops was Eruru.

Just like the first time they met, Kishida was standing by her side.

"What are you doing? Don't cause trouble for the neighbors, hurry and shut the lights and stay quiet."

"We leave once things are done. Will you hand it over, the pest?"

"...Are the analysis results out?"

"Yes. I have gone through proper procedure before coming here. So there was no need to seek your consent. This is my first and last warning to you, accomplice. Hand her over now."

Eruru's face was solemn and did not tolerate any objections.

On her orders, Hisui would probably be captured by one of the men standing by behind her.

Faced with this critical moment before the imminent crisis, Hisui clenched his fist and thought of countermeasures. The surrounding atmosphere grew tense.

Facing off silently, shrouded in danger—The silence was broken by a rude sound from behind Hisui.

"What's with these people? Hey you, hurry and explain to me!"

Rushella ignored Hisui and openly appeared at the door.

"...Idiot."

Hisui grumbled but things had already happened.

Captured—No, judging from Eruru's intent, this should be an extermination mission. The members of the tactical unit all entered high alert at the arrival of the "enemy."

"Oh my, this sure saves me a lot of effort."

"What are you planning? Hey, my servant, who's this girl? Why is a little runt acting so superior?"

"Please don't make things any more complicated..."

"Seriously. If you will obediently allow me to stake your heart and chop off your head, at least I will give you a swift end."

"You bitch..."

Feeling the murderous intent shrouding the entire surroundings, now Rushella understood her situation.

"Mere humans, what you do plan to do to me?"

"Destroy you. What about it?"

"Big words there. But you have no reason. I require blood for survival and you have no compelling reason to destroy me, right?"

"Speaking of reasons, the fact that you are a vampire is reason enough. Besides the evidence is iron-clad. That guy beside you gave us proof."

"What!?"

Rushella looked at Hisui in surprise, but he ignored her and simply stared at Eruru.

"I never thought you would drink the blood of so many young virgins. You're the greediest vampire in recent times in this area."

"You're talking about that whatever class rep...? But no, I didn't do it..."

"You're still denying? How unsightly. Your teeth matches the victim's bite marks completely. Also, this guy helped us to verify that."

"Teeth marks... Mine!? You...!"

Rushella recalled Mei's actions during the physical examination.

That turned out to be for this. And the reason was... Hisui's instructions.

"You suspected me after all...!?"

Rushella bit her lip and spoke, tears already appearing in her eyes.

But Hisui remained unmoved.

"What nonsense are you talking about? If a human had their blood sucked, then it's natural to suspect a vampire. Very well, Kujou-san, hand her over to us. I am duty-bound to deal with this pest."

Eruru, Kishida and the rest of the police approached.

Then Hisui finally reacted.

As though protecting Rushella, he stood before her, blocking the police team members.

"What now? You cannot be thinking of taking that pest's side, are you?"

"Then let me verify the evidence. Speaking of which, why did you guys suspect her in the first place?"

Hisui pointed his index finger at Rushella.

Seeing his serious face, Eruru could not help but sigh.

"...Because she is a vampire. Since victims have appeared, suspecting her is only natural, right?"

"Apart from her, there are other vampires."

"...What about the victim's testimony!?"

"This point exactly is what I find very suspicious. Why do you believe her so readily? Believing someone who has been bitten?"

"Why? ...Ah!"

Eruru shook involuntarily.

Indeed—That was an untrustworthy existence.

Once bitten, a person cannot be trusted.

As for why—

"Once bitten, a person will show loyalty towards the one who bit them—the master. A victim will only repay kindness with treachery towards people trying to protect them. Because of that, you kept the class rep tight up securely. Then you should know right? You can't believe the words of someone who's been bitten. They will usually defend their master. They can't possibly give up their master's identity. If they say it... It's more than likely on the master's orders, to find a scapegoat."

"...!"

All the policemen began to talk among themselves. They all possessed substantial knowledge on vampires. Hence, they could understand the key point that Hisui raised directly.

Feeling the gaze of her subordinates, Eruru remained calm.

"Indeed, what you say makes sense. However, the loyalty of the bitten varies substantially depending on the person's mental strength and rate of vampirization. And in this incident..."

"Almost on the verge of turning into a full vampire, the victim is a weak high school girl. No matter how you look at it, she can't possibly oppose the master's will. I also went to the hospital to confirm her condition. You should know better than me, right?"

Hisui's argument was even more acute.

Standing behind Eruru, the policemen's chattering became even noisier.

In order to prevent further chaos, Eruru took out the evidence.

"...But the teeth marks match. There has never been two people with completely identical teeth marks. This is just as precise as fingerprinting. There absolutely cannot be a mistake!"

"Really?"

"You are getting annoying! Why are you protecting this pest?"

"Impossible."

Hisui asserted with full confidence, instantly suppressing Eruru's intimidating aura.

"Impossible. The teeth marks could not possibly match."

"What rubbish are you spouting..."

"Just as she said... I did suspect her at one point."

Hisui pointed at Rushella behind him and said.

Indeed, he had suspected Rushella from a while ago.

However—

"I also suspected you guys. Members of the Supernatural Investigations Section?"

Seeing Hisui's acute gaze, Eruru could not help but feel intimidated. But she kept true to herself and mocked in reply:

"What nonsense are you saying... We are a proper police organization."

"Proper police organization that easily believes a bitten victim's testimony. Perhaps you guys... Making up a plausible criminal charge, trying to exterminate my freeloader... I felt that you guys had that intent. So in order to test if you guys are trustworthy... I did some slight tampering."

"Tampering...? What on earth did you do...!?"

"Before the teeth marks solidified completely, I adjusted them slightly to change the shape."

Hisui's words left Eruru's entire team standing there speechless.

Vanquishing a vampire who was feeding on human blood—This righteous reason was beginning to show cracks.

"So, it definitely cannot match Rushella's teeth marks exactly."

"You...!"

Eruru's face was emotionless.

The boy she had despised was now standing in her way as a giant threat.

Hisui pressed on his advantage.

"Why would teeth marks that could not match end up being a match for the bite marks on the class rep's neck? Very simple, that. Someone is fabricating evidence to set her up as the culprit."

Eruru clenched her tiny fists.

This decisive accusation caused the atmosphere to tense.

The criminal was not a vampire but a human.

The police team did not voice this but their inquiring gazes sought Eruru's confirmation.

"You believed me...?"

Silent all this time, Rushella asked gratefully.

Hisui scratched his head in embarrassment.

"...I suspected you in the beginning but then I believed you. So... What are we going to do here?"

Hisui answered in a casual tone of voice and glared at Eruru sharply.

Before Eruru could answer, her face gone pale, Hisui continued to pursue the heart of the matter.

"Ultimately, who sucked the class rep's blood? I have a clue. Say, mister, why didn't you report that particular matter!?"

Hisui looked towards—Kishida.

And everyone followed his gaze.

The man under everyone's attention simply muttered quietly.

"What a nuisance of a guy."

"Eh...!?"

The first to notice was Eruru.

The person who had followed her faithfully like a shadow suddenly disappeared.

Then Hisui noticed too.

The man whom he had met several times before suddenly vanished from view.

Clearly faster than the limits of human speed.

This was precisely as fast as a vampire.

His eyes gave off vivid red light and his mouth was filled with pale white and sharp teeth.

"Damn brat."

Kishida laughed violently and grabbed Hisui's arm, biting his neck!!

"You...!!"

Hisui felt a sharp pain from his neck and blood was being sucked away at a frightening rate.

This completely merciless blood sucking reminded Hisui of Reina's tragic state last night.

No mistake, this guy is the true culprit.

"What a clever brat, but this is the end of the line for you. You will help me block these pesky people."

"You bastard, get away from him!!"

Faster than anyone else, Rushella rushed towards Kishida.

But Kishida had expected it and smiled fearlessly, separating himself from Hisui's neck. This blood sucking, done with the intent to harm, ripped out large chunks of skin and flesh from Hisui's neck as the teeth were withdrawn.

Kishida smiled cruelly and threw Hisui towards Rushella.

"Hey, pull yourself together!!"

Rushella tearfully caught Hisui in her arms. All this was going according to Kishida's calculations.

Using this opportunity, he took out a spraying device and sprayed it at Rushella.

"This is...!?"

Instantly, Rushella's sense of smell was numbed.

This smell was just like the garlic attack she suffered from Hisui that time.

Naturally, this concentrated and intense stench was on completely different level than the little attack last time. Rather than a deterrent, this was a proper weapon for deploying against vampires.

Kishida used a simple gas mask to cover his mouth and nose, remaining unaffected. Looks like he had prepared beforehand to prevent the anti-vampire equipment from affecting himself.

"You bastard..."

Rushella did not even have the strength to speak. Unable to stand steadily, she collapsed.

Kishida snickered, grabbed the unconscious Rushella and ran away like a puff of smoke.

He easily jumped over the wall. His figure as he raced across the night was indeed that of a bona fide vampire.

"Chase him, hurry!!"

Eruru immediately issued orders. Several people followed Kishida on foot. The rest boarded the armored van and set off.

The vampire and the hunters all departed like a storm, leaving only Hisui and Eruru at the scene.

"Are you okay!?"

Eruru rushed over to Hisui and immediately started first aid. Because she was not carrying a medical kit, she could only use a white handkerchief as gauze, trying to staunch the bleeding.

Seeing the wound, Eruru could not help but frown and divert her gaze.

The wound was very deep.

The carotid artery had suffered severe damage, resulting in horrific bleeding. Part of the skin was completely chewed off. Not dying on the spot was quite fortunate already.

Nevertheless, he stood up.

"That bastard... Sucking away as he pleased... Rushella is much better than him... Glutton, greedy vampire... I'm guessing that's 2L taken? Oh well, it saves me the effort..."

Eruru was so frightened she instantly cried out.

"What are you talking about!? If you move recklessly now...!"

From Eruru's perspective, Hisui's blood loss was enough to be fatal. Everything he said was just trying to act tough. But Hisui showed his neck to her, causing Eruru to stare wide-eyed, dumbfounded.

"No way..."

The repulsive and terrifying teeth marks were already gone.

No, more strictly speaking, the wound still lingered... But it was disappearing before her eyes.

Ripped open by teeth, the wound was still seeping blood, but traces of the vampire's "kiss"—Had already healed.

"Why...!? Could it be, you're a vampire...!? No, that's impossible... Then another kind of supernatural creature... But, during the examination..."

"I am just a human. Except with a constitution that won't turn into a vampire, that's all."

Hisui remarked lightly. Having suffered an attack like Reina's, Hisui was further convinced that Kishida was the culprit.

"You won't turn into a vampire...? Impossible, that kind of thing...!!"

This phenomenon, overturning her world view, caused Eruru to shake her head repeatedly in denial.

Nevertheless, he was a true human. The examination results clearly wrote that. And the one conducting the examination was herself.

In mere minutes, something inside her brain was collapsing from its very roots.

"Look, the situation is a bit beyond expectation. But it turns out you're not the one fabricating..."

"Of course not!! Because I originally thought the culprit was surely..."

"You're saying that despite your hatred, you still follow the rules? So that guy fabricated the analysis results..."

"Looks like... it. I obtained the results from him... So he was framing other vampires for his crimes...? But why..."

Eruru bit her lip and shook her head.

Originally so strong, she was now a deeply troubled girl in Hisui's eyes.

It looked like the guy used to be quite a trusted subordinate of hers.

But in actual fact, he was a vampire who should be destroyed.

And right by her side, yet she did not see through it.

Although her situation was sympathetic, but unfortunately, Hisui currently did not have the time for that.

"That guy... Why did he abduct my freeloader? If he just wanted to escape, grabbing the most powerless human, me, would be the best choice. Wait, why did the class rep frame that girl? Since he doesn't want experts to see through him, hiding skillfully in human society, he shouldn't be drinking the class rep's blood with reckless abandon..."

"I have no idea about that...! How would I know what a vampire thinks!?"

Eruru cried out emotionally then bowed her head.

Her delicate and petite body was trembling, looking very vulnerable and frail.

"While going out on operations with that man, I have seen him under the sun many times. Recalling that, he must have shown me deliberately. Also, he is particularly punctual, that is probably in order to never forget to apply the light blocking agent. A habit of wearing gloves... To avoid skin contact with me."

"Direct contact would allow you to discover his use of the light blocking agent. Looks like he was quite on guard. But the problem is why would he deliberately infiltrate an organization most unfavorable towards vampires?"

Hisui's greatest doubt regarding Kishida was that.

Although he probably thought "the most dangerous place is the safest place" but being part of an anti-monster organization was too high a risk. Also mentally, there should have been quite a lot of stress.

Even so, he still hid his identity and laid low by Eruru's side.

Hisui had a theory regarding the reason for this.

"That guy... He kept one point to himself when he received Sudou's report."

"What happened? Sudou-san's report was passed on to me through him..."

"About my freeloader, what was the first report you received like?"

"Nothing special, very ordinary... Vampire attending high school... That was it."

"I knew it..."

It made sense now, Hisui nodded.

Eruru looked surprised and asked.

"What are you trying to say...? There is something suspicious about this report? At least, the appearance of a vampire girl, going to the same high school as you—These are all rigorous facts, right?"

"Indeed. But the important part was omitted. My freeloader claims to be a 'True Ancestor.'"

"What did you say!?"

Eruru's face changed in alarm.

A True Ancestor-class vampire—someone of that exalted status was in a place like this!?

"Impossible... That vampire, unbelievable, how... Nothing of that sort was in the report...!"

"Right... It didn't appear in the report. That Sudou girl said that she gave that Kishida guy the report. But he hid this fact and did not report to you. This is one of the reasons why I couldn't trust you guys completely. Clearly a True Ancestor-class vampire had appeared yet you take such ordinary measures. And regardless if you believed or not, at least you'd ask me for confirmation."

"Then... Kishida's goal... Was that girl from the very start...!?"

"Most likely. By staying by your side, the chances of running into his own kind became higher. Perhaps while assisting your work, he had been searching for a 'True Ancestor' in secret. Sucking the class rep's blood then framing Rushella. Then using the police to capture her. Then report to you the target was destroyed, allowing him to imprison her elsewhere... However, the most important reason still eludes me."

"Reasons do not matter at all! To think a True Ancestor-class vampire... What an embarrassment, I must instantly contact headquarters to send reinforcements... No, first, the equipment needs to be adjusted...!!"

Eruru ignored Hisui and began to take out her cellphone to operate with racking her brains.

Compared to Kishida, compared to the victim, her first thoughts were destroying the True Ancestor Rushella—In the end, everything in her heart returned to the starting point.

Hisui sighed lightly and asked her in exasperation.

"Hey hey, we already cleared her of the crime, are you still thinking of exterminating her?"

"If she really were a 'True Ancestor' then she must have sucked numerous people's blood to this date. Aren't her crimes obvious!?"

"Do you have a right to talk about others? What about yourself?"

Hisui reached out his left hand towards Eruru. Having wiped the wound on his neck, there was still some blood there that had not dried yet.

"...!"

Eruru turned her head away from Hisui's arm and covered her mouth. Not only that, she also began to cough, her body trembling slightly.

"You're afraid of blood?"

"O-Of course not... Just some old illness. I-I can treat it instantly..."

Taking out a medicine box with trembling hands, she popped tablets into her mouth.

But Hisui stopped her, scattering the tablets on the ground.

"What are you doing...!?"

"Stop it. Eating that is harmful to your body."

"What nonsense... This is just ordinary medicine..."

"That's right. Just ordinary medicine for suppressing your urge to suck blood."

Eruru's face instantly lost all expression.

She looked at Hisui, her face all pale—As pale as a vampire.

"What are you saying... You are not implying I am a vampire, are you!? Even as a joke, that is going too far!"

"That's true... You were fine standing in the setting sun."

Eruru suddenly recalled what happened earlier.

Earlier in the day, when Hisui came to find her, why he specifically waited outdoors.

That was to confirm. Confirm whether she was affected by sunlight.

"You suspected me...? Suspected me of being a vampire!?"

"Yes. Seeing the way you hated vampires, it reminded me of how like poles of a magnet repelled one another. Although not being afraid of sunlight could be due to applying the light blocking agent, I checked it out as well... But the result was you didn't use it."

Hearing Hisui's words, Eruru could not help but touch her cheek.

Earlier... Hisui had pinched her there.

She originally thought Hisui was childishly seeking revenge, but now she realized the true meaning behind his action.

He was checking out how her skin's texture.

Through texture, he confirmed whether a light blocking agent had been applied.

"You... when did you start suspecting me!?"

"The first time we met. Such a petite physique yet you seemed unnaturally strong. Also, you turned away when I had a nosebleed, right? An anti-vampire expert afraid of blood? I was thinking, perhaps you're not afraid of blood but you liked it too much—Seeing blood, you can't control yourself so you avoid it. Because that guy also did the same evasive action, I also became suspicious. Finally going as far as to open the window for ventilation... Truly suspicious."

"..."

To Hisui, visiting Reina was just an excuse.

His true motive was to confirm Eruru's identity.

"...How sly you are. But this all your random guessing, I am not a vampire."

"Right, you're not. Unafraid of light, you even use a gun with a cross imprinted on it."

Hisui admitted.

But he did not relent.

Almost in a merciless tone of voice, he revealed Eruru's true identity.

"You're a dhampir, right?"

Eruru lost all color in her face. With a fearful gaze, she took a step back.

Dhampir—A hybrid offspring between a vampire and a human.

Born in the gap between light and darkness, day and night, inheriting the blood of both races.

And their bodies naturally inherited dual characteristics of humans and vampires.

With sufficient intent, they could masquerade as normal humans virtually flawlessly, but Hisui discovered a tiny flaw in Eruru's behavior.

Eruru hugged herself, trembling nonstop.

It looked like the dangerous signs of drug withdrawal. Hisui gazed at her.

Eruru reached out a trembling hand, trying to get medication from the box but Hisui called out sharply.

"Didn't I say stop?"

Eruru bowed her head and bit her lip.

A dhampir's most taboo characteristic—the desire for human blood just like a vampire.

But unlike vampires, humans did not fall under their control as a result of a bite. Neither did they turn into vampires. However, the desire for fresh blood remained unchanged.

"Like vampires, dhampirs cannot stop their desire for blood. Neither vampires nor dhampirs would die from not drinking blood but their strength would diminish. But when diminished to the very limit, their power would suddenly grow great instead, turning them into an irrational monster that seeks nothing but blood. You should know that already."

"..."

"If you are considerate of the people around you, I think you should compromise a bit. Ingesting blood in small amounts would actually be a lot better. If you just keep suppressing it, the final impulse could be terrible. So..."

"So what!? Are you asking me to go suck blood!? Asking me to shamelessly suck blood!?"

Eruru looked up, her eyes filled with tears. She continued to yell hysterically.

"What do you know!? Do you understand the me who desires blood!? Do you understand that if I do not suppress it this way, I would lose my sanity!?"

She screamed at the top of her lungs, almost as though blood would gush out from her throat.

She had suppressed these feelings at the bottom of her heart. This could not be captured simply by "likes repel one another."

"This tragic situation, it is enough for me to shoulder on my own. That is why vampires must be exterminated...!"

That was why she desperately learned about vampires and pursued this career.

Hisui listened to her plead her mission, but wiped his index finger across Eruru's lips.

His fingertip was smeared with his own blood.

The moment the vivid red lipstick was applied on Eruru's lips, a minute amount of blood accidentally entered her mouth and relieved her desire for fresh blood.

"Y-You...!"

"What a nice person you are."

"W-What are you talking about..."

"When my blood was sucked just now, you instantly rushed over, worrying about me. That's no good... I was already ordered by that guy to stop you people. You should have been more vigilant."

"T-That was..."

"Same with the class rep, right? You believed the victim like a normal person. This is normal, right? I must be the abnormal one."

Eruru wanted to say something. Hisui turned his back to her and clumsily took out his cellphone.

"Hey, it's me. Could you come over? Where are you? The convenient store in Nichoume? Perfect... Then come over... That girl was captured... What, you're busy? Let me tell you, it's all because of you! I'll explain later. Thanks."

Hisui hung up. Then he muttered with his back to Eruru.

"I was raised by a vampire. However, the one who killed my real parents was that vampire as well."

"Huh!?"

Hisui divulged his origins in response to Eruru's confession.

However, completely unlike Eruru, Hisui spoke indifferently without emotion. His tone of voice was also very uninvolved.

"I can't really remember but apparently my parents wanted to kill me. A collective suicide? My parents wanted to kill me, who didn't know anything at the time, then commit suicide. Then a vampire happened to pass by, killed my parents and saved me and raised me. This sort of situation, what do you think I should do about it? Hate the vampire for killing my parents? Thank her for saving me? As a human, what should I do?"

Eruru did not answer.

This type of question could not be answered.

"Ludicrously, that vampire died to save me in the end. For my sake, turned into ash."

Memories of the past surfaced before Hisui's eyes.

Enduring the scorching from the intense sun in the sky, the vampire who kept performing chest compressions to rescue the boy.

"That person not only saved me but also many humans at the scene, finally dying herself."

"..."

"However, the humans who were saved, everyone was cursing at the vampire. Saying monster, you deserve to die, *etc*. Some people even threw rocks at her. Hey, which side is right in your view?"

Eruru could not answer, she did not want to confront this type of question at all.

However, Hisui continued to question mercilessly.

"What should I do? Because I'm human, should I follow those humans and curse the vampire who raised me? But as a human, shouldn't' I say thanks first? Whether the other person is a vampire or a monster or not... I should first say 'thank you', right?"

Hisui turned to look at Eruru but her face was turned away. No, she was avoiding Hisui's gaze.

"Before that person died, she turned me into this kind of constitution. Otherwise I surely would have died. Hence... Ever since, I won't turn into a vampire even if bitten by one. So... What am I now?"

"...?"

"Humans turn into vampires once bitten by vampires. Conversely, someone who doesn't turn into a vampire after being bitten would not be human. Then what am I? A supernatural creature? Or neither human nor supernatural, some kind of monster?"

Hisui continued to stared at Eruru as he asked.

Eruru could not answer but did not avoid his gaze, staring at him straight.

"That kind of thing I guess. Whether human or vampire..."

"So... You want to save that vampire? Saving an enemy of mankind...?"

"That girl... Drenched by rain, when she most wanted to suck blood... She didn't. Clearly a vampire."

"..."

"For my sake, she even tried to practice her blood sucking technique... Just now also... tried to save me. So what do you say, what should I do?"

This was a so-called calm tone of voice.

But the firm resolved it carried, Eruru could feel it clearly.

"That girl promised me. Before figuring out her origins, she won't suck anyone's blood but mine. I also responded to her promise. Before that... I'll be her servant. So I must go to where my master is."

Saying that, Hisui entered his own home.

Eruru stared at his back, spacing out, then a familiar voice was heard from behind.

"Good evening~ Ah, looks like the mood isn't quite right. There's been a commotion nearby?"

Mei was in her uniform, opening the gate and entering the yard.

"Sudou-san... Why are you here?"

"Hi-kun called me here. Then... Who got caught? Rushella?"

"Do you intend to assist him...? No matter what I instruct, do note that saving her is Kujou Hisui's willful decision, okay? I will not be providing any reward."

"Yes~ Oh well, it can't be helped. Who can refuse a lover?"

Although suddenly called here, Mei did not seem annoyed.

Unable to comprehend, Eruru simply asked in puzzlement.

"Why...? Don't you hate vampires as well?"

"I do dislike them, yes... And for me, she counts as a rival."

"I don't understand. In particular... I don't understand Kujou Hisui. Why is he able to go this far?"

"Right. But, if Rushella really sucked the class rep's blood... He'd probably exterminate her by his own hands."

"...!"

"This is probably his way of taking responsibility? But in his heart, he believed in Rushella's innocence. That's why he pondered so much and verified so many things... Seeking the truth all along. But he also worried about the class rep at the same time. Human and vampire—clearly taking one side was enough but he wants both and seeks the hardest path. To this date... And probably henceforth as well. If Rushella sucked anyone else's blood, he will exterminate her personally. That's the kind of resolve he has made."

"Who on earth is he...?"

"Just a human. But a human who treats non-human entities equally. After he found out my identity... Nothing changed. Although I'm quite confident in my appearance... But most people would distance themselves after finding out, right? But he didn't. Neither distancing himself nor getting any funny ideas— just continuing as normal."

Mei spoke with a bright expression. She originally treated him as just the target for her baby making mission, but before she knew it, he had become her fated one true love. Meeting this kind of human, even her first ancestor might have avoided resenting being created and lived a happy life instead.

"...I do not understand."

Eruru fell silent. Footsteps were heard from behind at this moment.

Turning back, she found Hisui coming out. The moment she looked at him, Eruru felt a sense of dizziness.

"It's better that you don't look. Even if you're a hybrid, it could still be fatal."

Hisui was carrying on his back something that made Eruru, no, something that made all vampire kin feel shocked.

A giant silver cross.

He had pulled it out from the basement, wrapped its chains around his hand and carried the cross on his back.

"What is that...?"

Careful not to look at the cross behind him that stood at his height, Eruru turned her gaze away and inquired.

"The cross-shaped sacred sword, the 'Tzara Blade.' Just by raising it, ordinary vampires will be immobilized. Its blade is also very sharp. Its only flaw is it's too heavy. Probably 30kg."

"I have researched crosses in my line of work, yours... Clearly a weapon? And the holiness it carries... Very extraordinary."

"A certain savior was crucified on this thing in the past. Thus the cross turned from a symbol of death into a sacred symbol. Reportedly, this is the antique surviving from that time period. Because it's forged from silver then processed, whether as a work of art or a weapon against vampires, it is the highest ranked. If it's not handled carefully, those bigshots at the Vatican might come running to reclaim it."

"How did such an extraordinary item fall into your hands!?"

"I inherited it from my foster parent."

Hisui simply explained in a sentence and turned towards Mei who had rushed over.

"So, could you help me carry this? I'm already out of strength."

"What... You're treating me as mover!?"

"Well, you're strong. Please, my blood was sucked, I'm already seeing stars."

"Fine... Then you must go on a date with me next time, okay? Includes an overnight stay."

"I'm going home by sunset and you bear all the costs, please accept my haggling."

Mei shrugged and reluctantly took the Tzara Blade. Then she lifted it effortlessly with one hand.

Then the two exited the garden, Eruru following them.

"W-Wait, you two. You're going to save that vampire!? You know where she is?"

"You gave Sudou all kinds of tools, right? I saw a tracking device among them so I secretly placed it on that girl's person. Vampire aside, if that clueless lady wandered off, who knows how much trouble she'd cause to others."

To think Hisui was this well-prepared.

He lightly raised his right hand and ran into the night with Mei... But no sooner had they taken two steps, Eruru had already grabbed their collars and dragged them back.

"Say, we're in a hurry you know?"

"I'd like to get things done and go home too, yeah?"

"In this emergency situation, you still want to carry that conspicuous object out in the open, running on your legs like fools? Use your brains a little. I am calling for a car."

At some point, Eruru had recovered her former eloquence.

Probably due to the earlier commotion, her half-framed glasses were almost falling off. Eruru pushed them up with her hands, a flash of inspiration glinting in her eyes.

"Also, let us discuss our plan."

Chapter 6 - Anti-Drac Anti-Vampire

"This place is...?"

Rushella woke up and looked in all directions, finding herself in a dim location.

This looked like a warehouse, with cardboard boxes scattered all around. The warehouse was quite spacious with faint sounds of ocean waves and the smell of the tide. This was probably a corner somewhere in the harbor.

Chasing after hazy memories, she then flew into a rage.

Back when the pungent smell of garlic hit her, she could not bear it no matter what.

Right, I fainted and lost consciousness, then...

Rushella recalled her mistake and could not help but gnash her teeth. Then immediately she discovered that her arms and legs were immobilized.

"...!?"

She could not move naturally. Because her limbs were bound tightly by silver chains then tied to the wall. These chains were apparently prepared in advance and already installed into the wall, extremely secure.

But as a vampire, if Rushella used her full strength, breaking the wall should not be that hard—but she could not do it.

"Silver, huh..."

Because touching the chains produced a scorching pain akin to being burned, only then did she realize the chain's material. Vampires were afraid of silver itself. These chains were most likely designed specially for vampires, making escape even harder.

"You woke, Your Highness the True Ancestor?"

"You...!"

Although Rushella did not know him, the man before her was Kishida whom Hisui and Eruru were well acquainted with.

"Who are you...? You should be my kin. But how are you able to use this contemptible thing."

Just as Rushella pointed out, no matter how effective anti-vampire equipment was against other vampires, a vampire would find them difficult to use. But this man was making perfect use of them.

"Please call me the Baron. Although it differs from the West, I have received an official title of nobility in this country."

"Really... I heard from my servant already, this country no longer has a system of nobles. Judging from that fact, you must have lived here since a long time ago."

"Compared to a True Ancestor, I'm nothing. But living in the human world, I have learned knowledge. Although using these kinds of tools to bind my kin is difficult for myself, a person in the process of turning does not have this inconvenience."

Behind the Baron, a girl in a patient's gown was standing at his service.

"The class rep...!? You bit her!?"

"Exactly. A young virgin... especially a saint, how could I resist? Well done. These chains I'm unable to touch, by ordering her who is still in the middle of turning, she helped me to tie you up."

"I see... You sucked her blood to approach, but not reach full vampirization in order to create a more loyal servant who can perform tasks you cannot. What a lowly man you are."

"Very unfortunately, I am not as noble a vampire as a True Ancestor."

Mixed with self-mockery and anger, the Baron smiled in a complicated manner, twisting his lips.

Rushella went "hmph" and asked arrogantly:

"Then, why would you perpetrate such rude behavior against one so far above you as I am? Have you been smitten by my charm?"

"Charm... That is true in a way. I have spent so much effort searching for a True Ancestor-class vampire."

"How so?"

"I became a vampire out of my own volition. I asked my 'master' to suck my blood, thereby abandoning my human identity. I originally looked forward to eternal life, but once I got my wish I discovered there were so many inconveniences."

"My race's weaknesses are common knowledge. You should have known beforehand, right? Don't complain after the fact."

"Indeed... Light, crosses and the like cannot be helped. But not only that, for those of us who became a vampire through a master's bite, we must live in fear of death every moment of our lives, do you know why?"

"Like I would know."

Rushella replied arrogantly.

These troubles of lowly commoners did not concern her.

The Baron's face twisted in resentment after hearing her.

"How arrogant of you. For us 'servants,' when the 'masters' are destroyed, we also perish in a chain reaction. Do you understand? Immortality is just an empty label when we 'servants' must fear destruction through chain reaction every second. Can you understand these troubles!?"

"I don't want to understand. You're just mentally weak. If you want to preserve your existence, just leave descendants behind. The master-servant chain reaction does not spread to blood relatives. It's only an issue between the biter and the bitten. Since your descendants won't be killed, your bloodline continues to be passed down."

"Utterly inane. I only want myself to survive eternally. Not just that, I can't even surpass my 'master' in power ever. All I can do is fear the chain destruction. No matter how many people's blood I suck, this fact cannot be changed. Who wants such a fate?"

The Baron discarded his earlier calm and gestured with his arms and legs in an exaggerated manner.

"Precisely because of that, I have made my decision. I will achieve the taboo that no vampire has achieved so far: surpassing the master! Hence, I have sought the 'True Ancestor'... but perhaps you are a fake?"

The Baron extended his finger towards the neckline of Rushella's dress. His sharp claws scratched her large bosom, leaving a red trail over her skin.

"Bastard...!"

Embarassement and slight pain made Rushella roar. Blood seeped out where her chest was scratched, then dripped to the floor.

Rushella suddenly realized his intent and looked down.

So did the Baron.

This was the method Hisui described to identify a True Ancestor and the result was right there.

A rose-like elegant emblem appeared on the floor. Despite falling naturally due to gravity, the droplets of blood produced an extremely complicated and intricate pattern, carved distinctively on the floor even though a skilled craftsman would find it difficult to trace out.

"A real 'True Ancestor'...!! Looks like I've finally found one."

Clenching his fists, the Baron spoke emotionally.

Rushella was also relieved that her memory was not forged. However, she immediately felt gloomy.

"Now that you've verified I'm a True Ancestor... what are you going to do? Even if it's me, I have no way to release you from a vampire's fate, right!?"

"Hard to say. If your body is researched and completely understood, perhaps I can find the answer? Also, True Ancestors themselves are unknown mysteries. If humans are the race that were born through evolution, then what's their method of turning into a vampire without biting humans? If they're like apes, where branch species arose aside from humans, what is the reason for those branch splits? If they're like aliens, xenomorphs completely unrelated to humans, then where did vampires come from? No matter what the truth is, a True Ancestor's body must hide the secrets to 'surpassing the master'!!"

The Baron's eyes shone with dangerously cold light. An evil crimson brightness.

His way of licking his lips made Rushella feel chills down her spine.

Rushella wondered if she made such a hateful face whenever she sucked blood as well?

"Although I've been thinking many things... but first, let me taste the 'blood' as the source of power."

Face twisted uglily, exhaling breath that reeked of blood, he approached Rushella's pale white neck.

"S-Stop it... Get away from me!!"

"What's to be afraid of? So many years in passing, you must have sucked countless people's blood already."

No! She wanted to say. At least in her memory, she had only sucked Hisui's blood.

The face before her was filled with gluttony or lust, one could not tell them apart, his bloodshot eyes looked frightening.

Only when placed in a situation of her blood about to be sucked did Rushella finally experience the fear and revulsion felt by the victims. Standing there with hollow eyes on the side, did the class rep feel the same back then?

Rushella felt lustful breath on her neck.

Long sharp fangs were about to pierce her skin.

"NO...!"

Tears appeared in her eyes as she screamed feebly, matching her appearance of a girl.

Just at this time.

"What kind of R-rated show are you performing, old guy?"

The Baron looked back in surprise. Rushella was also dumbfounded.

Neck wrapped heavily in bandages, Hisui stood there, smiling fearlessly.

"Let's put aside the fact of her physical age. Her mental age is clearly a teenager's no matter how you cut it. Making a move on a minor, that's a crime even if the girl consents. Isn't that common sense?"

"How did you...!"

Rushella could not help but cry out with joy.

Hisui shrugged to hide his embarrassment and said indifferently.

"I will save you so you owe me one. So... old guy, did you hear my warning?"

"Who would heed you...!! Why can you oppose me!? I sucked your blood!?"

"Unfortunately for you, my constitution is a bit strange. If negotiations don't work, only force remains."

At this time, Rushella and the Baron finally noticed the silver chain wrapped around Hisui.

As well as carried on his back: a giant cross!

The two vampires relexively closed their eyes and turned their faces away.

Hisui stabbed the Tzara Blade into the ground and crashed with all his might into the cross.

"Uruaaaaaaaaaaa!!"

A blunt sound resulted from the cross, stabbed into the ground. The heavy noises echoed in the warehouse like a bell. This vibration, resembling a tuning fork's, immediately produced an effect that drove off vampires.

"Ah—!"

The Baron roared and covered his ears. Tied up, Rushella could only twist her face in pain, shaking her head. Even in the process of turning, Reina had to cover her ears and crouch down.

The only one here completely unaffected was Hisui.

Using the Tzara Blade as a tuning fork to produce sonic waves, this was just a bell's noisy racket for humans. But the sound produced by a holy cross was equivalent to a choir singing hymns to a vampire.

Hisui took this opportunity to get past the Baron and rush towards Rushella.

"You look really kinky here... are you okay?"

"S-Shut up... why didn't you come earlier... Also, what's with that noise..."

To a vampire, this noise would be like scratching fingernails on a blackboard or noisy rock and roll.

Hisui ignored the panting Rushella and helped release her from the chains' restraints.

"Fucking brat... Getting in my way everywhere!!"

"You woke up huh? Excuse me, I'm a bit busy right now. So... I'm leaving things to you, Sudou."

"Coming coming~❤"

With a seductive reply, Mei stepped into the warehouse.

As soon as the Baron discovered her, she grabbed him by the neck with her slender arms and threw his entire body into the air!

"What—!?"

"Not to the extent of my ancestor, but I'm still quite strong, you know❤"

Mei winked seductively at the Baron flying through the air as she spoke.

She widened her right eye and light began to concentrate—then she fired a heat beam.

The focused beam of light scorched the Baron's face, lighting up the warehouse instantly as bright as daytime. The burned Baron rolled on the floor with unsightliness.

"Okay, mission accomplished... Is that okay?"

Mei was about to turn towards Hisui proudly but in the end, she stared at the Baron with a severe expression.

She also expected it. Since the enemy was a vampire—immortal—he was tough to handle.

"Not too bad... little girl!!"

The Baron's face was badly burned but the burns were recovering at an astounding rate.

Even if scorched by a nuclear weapon's shockwave, they can revive—that was the vampire.

"You're dead meat!!"

The Baron bared his fangs and attacked Mei. Using his claws, sharp enough to serve as weapons, he swung at Mei with full force.

"Oh dear, you want a contest of strength?"

Mei entered a combat stance and met the Baron's arms with her own, smiling fearlessly.

The delicate looking girl vs the vampire—who would have expected Mei to win a contest of strength? With brute force completely unmatching her figure, she pushed the Baron back.

"Hmph... As expected of Frankenstein's creature..."

"Compared to the first, my strength is already adjusted much lower, you know? But still, much stronger than you, that's all."

"Perhaps. But you're just as stupid as your ancestor."

"What did you say!?"

Mei roared angrily and went all out. Despite his disadvantage, the Baron remained composed.

"Say, artificial human... what is going to happen to this girl in the process of turning?"

Mei realized she was careless.

Inside the warehouse... there was one more person. Although infinitely approaching a vampire, she was still human.

Reina stood behind the Baron.

She held a knife... to her own throat.

"If you continue to hinder me, she's dead. You should know that someone who is turning will obey the master who bit them, right? Besides, her blood is almost completely sucked dry so she'll listen to me unconditionally. I turned her like this just in case of something like this."

"Bastard—!!"

Unforgivable.

But even the laser could not give him a fatal wound. Unless he was completely destroyed, the current situation remained unchanged.

Mei was stuck in stalemate.

Hisui and Rushella were also on the side, watching the impasse.

Although finally free of the chains, due to the chain's holy property, Rushella's strength had not yet recovered.

"What should we wo...? If this continues, that fake, even the class rep will...!"

"I know. So... hurry and suck my blood."

Hisui said softly. Taking off the first aid bandages, he exposed his neck. Although this was the most effective way to let Rushella recover her combat strength, she shook her head.

"No... you're already pale from blood loss. Already... lots had been sucked, right!?"

"...Not that much. It's nothing."

Hisui tried to act tough but blood-related matters could not deceive Rushella.

With a caring expression, she said solemnly.

"In fact, you're finding it hard to move your body, right? I can tell that. If you get your blood sucked even more...!"

"It's fine. You don't need to worry about that."

"If I sucked enough to recover my energy, you'll...!!"

"Stop saying nonsense and drink."

Hisui did not allow any objections. Rushella fell silent.

Trying to persuade her, he continued:

"If this continues, me, Sudou and the class rep are all dead. And who knows what treatment you'll get. But if you use your full strength, that kind of third-rate garbage can be handled easily, right? In the worst, the only sacrifice is me."

"You...!!"

"Fine, don't worry, just drink enough to recover your energy. But you must destroy that old guy."

Hisui looked into Rushella's eyes as he spoke.

There was no time to hesitate.

"But...!"

As if interrupting their argument that was about to start up again, Mei was thrown to the ground beside them.

"Sudou...! Are you okay!?"

"Probably... not."

Saying that, Mei closed her eyes and stopped moving.

Hisui pulled Rushella towards his neck and said again:

"Suck it right now."

Silently, Rushella sank her fangs into Hisui's neck as a reply.

"Hmph... Finally acting a little like a True Ancestor. However, although that brat's blood is tasty, its 'quality' is terrible. Even though I sucked so much, I didn't feel any power at all."

"..."

"At least suck him dry. That way there might be a little feeling."

"Shut up!!"

Rushella roared and jumped into the air.

At her feet lay Hisui who had fallen powerless.

Like Reina and the rest, his entire body lost all color of blood and his pale white face looked like a corpse.

All the blood was drained from him.

"Bastard... I won't forgive you!!"

Rushella drew her short swords from the sheaths on her thighs and slashed at the Baron backhanded.

This strange dual-wielding was swift as lightning, so fast that even the Baron could not handle it.

However, he smiled fearlessly and chose to retreat.

"Don't think you can flee!!"

"I'm not fleeing, just finding my hostage."

The Baron escaped towards the collapsed Hisui.

As he sank his claws into Hisui's neck, Rushella's face went livid.

"I knew it. Your speed is definitely fast but still too far from True Ancestor-class in power. You probably tried to leave him some blood in an attempt to spare this brat's life? You didn't think I'd notice?"

"Shut up... Get away from him!!"

"You're so persistent. Well then... offer yourself obediently to me."

Helpless with Hisui as the hostage, Rushella had no choice but to silently throw down her twin swords.

The Baron immediately grabbed Rushella and pushed her down on the floor.

"My servant. If this girl resists in any way, immediately kill the brat."

Hearing the Baron's orders, Reina stumbled over to Hisui.

Seeing her last hope dashed, Rushella lost the will to resists.

The Baron gloated proudly, approaching Rushella's neck with his fangs.

Rushella tearfully turned her face away.

Only to see Hisui sprawled on the ground like her in front of her eyes.

"...Eh?"

His completely bloodless looking body suddenly moved.

Dissatisfied.

Not enough blood.

This feeling was like life itself was draining from his entire body.

Yes. This is the moment I'm waiting for.

Blood loss—over 2L. Almost half of the entire body's blood.

In other words—the critical value for fatality.

Blood pressure dropping rapidly, entering circulatory shock, heart beats weakening.

As his consciousness gradually grew hazy, rejected memories were awakening.

On that battlefield full of blood and screams, a certain person had desperately tried to save his life.

"You will live on."

Trying to call him back from the boundary of life and death, she desperately performed chest compressions. That vampire had said that.

It's enough, he wanted to tell her.

It's already enough. Don't continue—he wanted to tell her that.

Clearly a vampire but being exposed out in bright daylight.

For saving, doing this kind of thing...

Her skin was more white and pristine than anyone's. Raven black hair. Beautiful face. All turned into dust and ashes.

Collapse had already started. Every time her hands pressed on my chest, more 'ash' fell and scattered.

Enough, it's already enough, Miraluka.

But that woman did not stop.

Until I woke up.

In order to stop me from dying, in order to make me revive.

Even with my blood sucked by a vampire—she made me continue living as a human.

Even when I was about to be killed by a vampire—she made me continue living.

The awakening was imminent.

Hisui slowly stood up.

As though to show everyone present, he took off the bandage from his neck.

Then solemnly, he whispered the words of an oath.

"...Eli Eli lama sabachthani. Your blood is my blood; my blood is your blood. Blood entering the body to slake my thirst; Yonder God of the heavens, liberate me from this cross; The time for atonement is about to arrive!"

Anti-DracAnti-Vampire mode, activate.

Instantly, everyone present heard a noise, one that everyone was familiar with, yet normally not aware of.

The especially loud sound of a heart beating endlessly.

"Get away."

By the time the Baron realized this was Hisui's voice behind him, he was already flying.

Only when his body struck the wall violently did he realize he was kicked flying.

Impossible.

Not an artificial human but a normal human, and even a human on the verge of death at that.

But reality was harsh and merciless.

"Stand back, Rushella."

Hearing him call her name, Rushella looked up blankly at Hisui. His face was still completely devoid of color. But he was not his usual self.

The exposed neck with the bandages off, let alone traces of blood sucking, even the flesh torn by fangs was regenerating.

But around the white neck there was a pitch black crest that resembled thorns in shape.

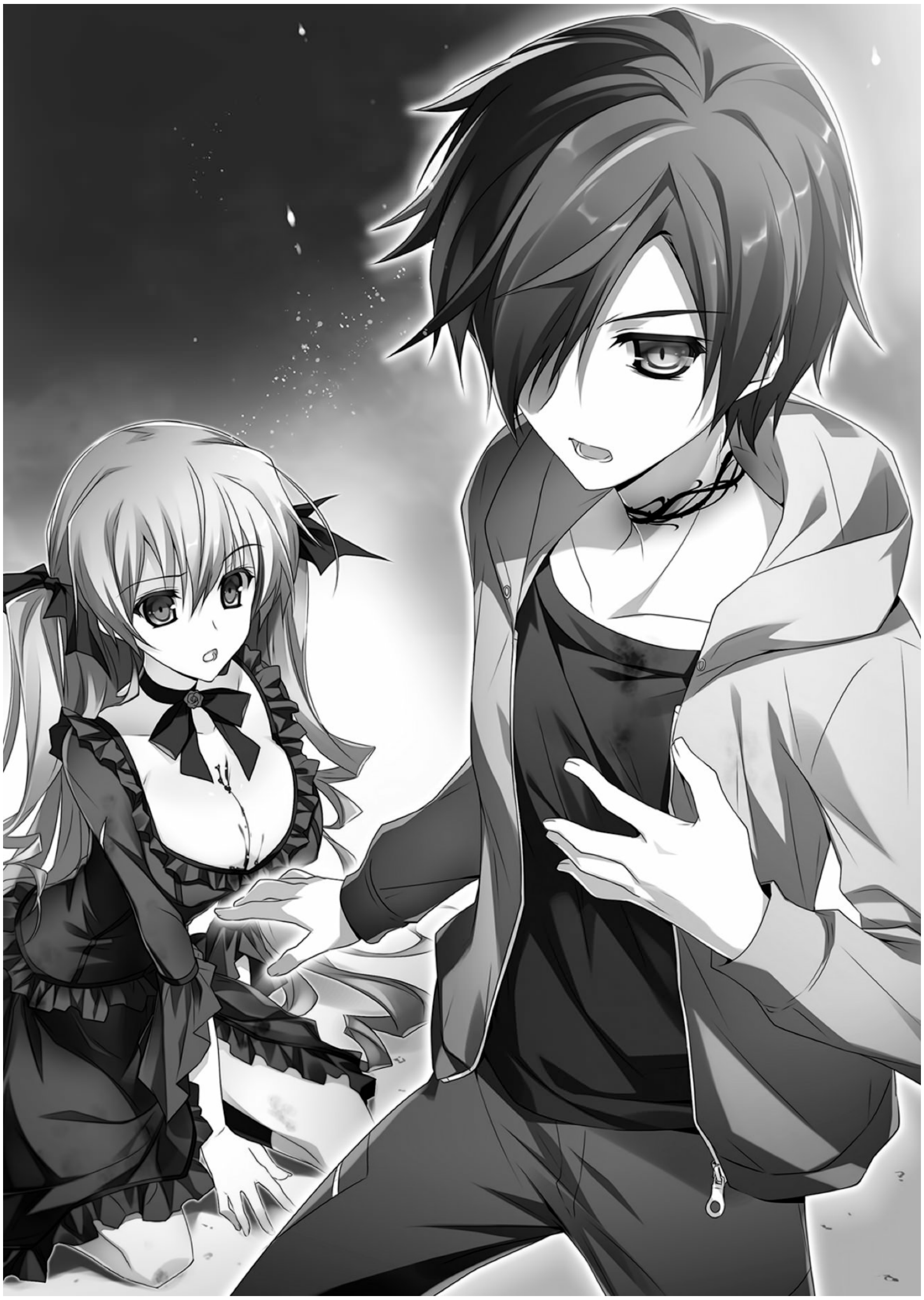
Surrounded by thorns, the neck looked like it forbid all contact and rejected the act of blood sucking itself.

The scar marking the center of his chest was glowing with crimson light through his clothing!

"Who are you!?"

Faced with the Baron's question, Hisui lightly caressed the scar on his chest.

"This constitution of mine... not turning into a vampire no matter how much blood is sucked, if I died from blood sucking, it'd be meaningless. Hence, on the verge of death from blood loss, it automatically becomes like this."



Indeed—it became like this. For protecting oneself from the fangs of vampires.

Although born as a mortal, the existence capable of opposing vampires.

Rapid recovery of wounds, immunity to vampires, this sort of constitution.

Namely, the Anti-Drac.

The existence diametrically opposed to vampires. A vampire's nemesis.

Existing beyond the crimson fate.

Iscariot.

Precisely due to this constitution, he was afraid that Rushella might suck too much blood.

Because he did not want to hurt her.

"Could it be, you asked me to drink your blood to turn into this...!?"

"Blood loss is difficult to control. If I did it myself, who knows how much effort it'd take so I had you suck it. I believe in you, that you'd stop before I died from blood loss."

"Idiot...!!"

Rushella tearfully poked him but her face was smiling.

"I said it before. In a critical moment, a certain power will awaken in my body."

Hisui looked at the Baron again.

He was glaring back at Hisui, teeth gnashing.

Humans could not possibly have such a body—he kept repeating in his mind.

But reality was harsh, the human who overturned vampires' common sense was standing before him definitely.

He was currently at disadvantage—hence, he decided to make use of Reina whom he had prepared for this kind of situation.

When he looked at Reina, he found standing beside Reina another person he had been using.

Kariya Eruru.

Hisui's earlier plan was to have Eruru prioritize protecting the ordinary human Reina.

When Hisui's awakening drew the Baron's attention away from Reina, only then did Eruru enter the warehouse.

"You...!"

"You know my marksmanship, right? Missing is impossible. Apart from this poor victim here, please go ahead and find a meatshield. After all, you will not die from one or two bullets."

Eruru spoke coldly, took out the weapon that did not match her petite physique, and aimed the sacred gun Argentum towards her former subordinate.

"...You're putting up a tough front, Miss Consultant. You're not as experienced as you think. Even if you can be utterly merciless towards vampires, you can't do it to a human. Oh well... after all, you're just a dirty counterfeit, no surprise there."

"..."

Eruru did not waver. However, her finger's force on the trigger was increasing.

"So... You're unable to shoot that damn brat, right!?"

The Baron moved.

Eruru pulled the trigger without any hesitation.

The sound of gunshot. Just as she warned, the bullet pierced the Baron's right shoulder unerringly.

The Baron endured the scorching sensation of sacred pain, feeling there was a chance of victory.

This is fine. As long as my heart and brain are not hit, it doesn't matter at all.

Although having his body pierced hurt a lot, having the silver bullet remain inside the body would produce even more damage.

He forced his body to move. Once I reach that damn brat, if only I can get near that human!!

The Baron displayed a vampire's full capabilities at night and quickly grabbed Hisui, using him as a shield facing Eruru.

"How's that, you can't shoot now, right!? Although you're acting tough, you can't kill humans!"

As if affirming his words, Eruru made a troubled expression and lowered her gun.

The Baron smiled proudly and attacked Hisui's neck with his fangs again!

"Will not turn into a vampire...!? How could something so ridiculous be possible!? I'll suck again and make you my servant!!"

With this, I have a chance of winning. Make him my meatshield, use him as bait, there are any number of ways to use him.

Although the True Ancestor is right here, it's a shame to let her escape, but I can just bide my time for a comeback—

"Idiot~"

"...Eh?"

He was unable to suck blood.

Fangs—could not move. For sure, he had torn through skin, pierced flesh and reached the blood vessel.

However, a strong pressure prevented him from going any further. On further examination, not a single drop of blood flowed out from Hisui's wound.

"Impossible... You!?"

Hisui had not moved.

All that moved were the platysma and sternocleidomastoid muscles.

In other words, simply through muscular power, just by contracting his muscle, he had blocked the Baron's teeth.

"What—!?"

"You forgot about my constitution?"

The neck with the crest of thorns was physically rejecting blood sucking.

The Anti-Drac.

True to its name, this completely rendered blood sucking ineffective.

"Kishida, let me tell you this. All your actions have occurred within our calculations. We already planned ahead of time what a vampire would do when cornered. Too easy to guess. You are the one who fell into a trap."

Eruru mocked.

The Baron's mobility was sealed, his face turned pale.

Then Hisui counterattacked.

"Rushella!!"

Hearing her name called, Rushella understood Hisui's intent.

"Hurry and get your filthy mouth away from my servant!!"

Rushella roared angrily, picked up a sword from the floor and threw it at the Baron's heart.

"Ah—!!"

The Baron spewed fresh blood. Due to the intense pain of his heart piereced, he stopped for a few short seconds.

Hisui did not miss the chance, relaxing his neck muscles, he released the Baron and kicked backwards, creating some distance in order to unleash the final terminating move.

"Hi-kun!!"

Struck down by the Baron earlier, Mei called out.

After she recovered, she had secretly moved over to the Tzara Blade embedded in the floor.

Her original mission was to pin down the Baron as well as move Hisui's heavy weapon.

"Catch!"

Uprooting the magnificient giant cross, she used her inborn strength to throw it at Hisui.

"Nice."

The circular portion at the center of the Tzara Blade was a perfect fit for Hisui's right arm. Instantly, the thorny crest appeared over Hisui's right arm and temporarily raised his strength.

As if equipped with a cross shaped shield, used as a bladed weapon it would be like a shuriken, Hisui's right arm was transformed into an anti-vampire armament combining offense and defense.

Simply the sight of the brilliant silver luster was enough to make the Baron lose his will to fight.

The cross's image seared into his eyes, stopping all his bodily functions including regeneration.

Everything was for this current moment—in order to use the most effective anti-vampire weapon to exterminate him for good.

"Stop it...!! I was wrong..."

"Oh~ Whatever."

Hisui spoke completely unenthusiastically.

He felt bored to death from the bottom of his heart and declared coldly.

"Everything will be repaid by your blood."

With a flash of silver, he gracefully severed the Baron's neck.

The sharp blade then turned towards the decapitated body and pierced the heart without hesitation!

Chopping off the head, piercing the heart, faithfully recreating this ancient legend, the Baron's entire body instantly turned to ash.

The body quickly collapsed and perished forever without trace.

"Well done!!"

Rushella ran over and cheered with joy.

Then Hisui collapsed in her bosom.

"Ah, hey, what are you doing!?"

Hisui did not move. Just like before he awakened... no, his face was even more pale than that, he was in a complete coma.

"No good... complete shock has occurred. He needs a transfusion quickly..."

Eruru noticed Hisui's state and immediately took action.

"Can he be saved!?"

"We must move him immediately. Please help me!"

Then Hisui was moved out of the warehouse.

Dawn was about to arrive soon.

The time of the day belonging to humans had finally arrived, but the boy watched over by the girls was still lingering on the boundary of life and death.

Epilogue

"....I am still alive."

Hisui, lying on the bed, murmured to himself.

He got up from the sick bed, and looked out of the window; it looked like daylight outside.

"Are you awake?"

Looking over, Eruru sat on the chair by the bed, operating a notebook computer.

"Eh..."

"Please say thank you to that..."

Eruru looked at Rushella, who was sleeping by Hisui's bedside.

Looked like she was keeping Hisui company, her face was a bit pallid.

"You are AB/Rh-type, which the Blood Bank doesn't have much in storage, so she decided to donate her blood to you. The two of you are the same type."

"But...receiving a vampire's blood, you know what will happen right? It is likely you will become an undead abomination."

"True...we have considered the situation, but she refused to listen...all she wanted was to save your life. Also, [your body] shouldn't have any problems, right? In reality there is no issue?"

"What do you think I am?"

"Your body is interesting, your physical attributes...appears not to be something you were born with, how was it changed?"

"I am not sure..."

"The scar on your chest--is that a mark from surgery? Where is your heart from?"

"...................."

"Blood is source of life, so the organ that regulates blood flow is the one that controls life itself. Thus, against a vampire, striking through the heart with a stake is fatal. The source of your strength...isn't just flowing from that mysterious heart?"

"I don't know..."

"But?"

Holding his chest, Hisui smiled.

"Miraluka paid with her life, to make my heart beat again. To let a heart beat again after it stopped, letting herself turn into ash."

"It is so mysterious. It is disappointing I could not dissect you."

Eruru whispered without any expression. To be honest, she could do something that frightening.

"I investigated that Holy Sword of yours, it seem to be a treasure. One could say it is the Bane of all Vampires. The relative who left it with you..."

"It's the Vampire who took care of me."

"Why did she give you something like this?...Is it to protect you? And about your physical attributes, is everything for your survival as a human?"

"I think I was an experiment. How could vampires coexist with humans--she always considered this question. But even when she succeeded she still died, what was the point?"

Hisui felt crushed by his guilt, balling his fists together.

"Just to save me, she didn't have to make things so complicated, all she had to do was suck my blood and turn me into a vampire. Then she could have been saved too. The so-called eternity she hated, I could have accompanied her, it would let me live with her forever."

In front of Hisui's eyes were his beloved caretaker's final moments.

Bathed in sunlight, turned into ash. In the instant he picked her up, the remaining body was scattered by the wind. No matter how tightly he held on, in the end, he held on to nothing.

Her beautiful face, dark hair, red lips, all vanished as if they never existed.

Couldn't even hold her in my arms.

"That person...didn't turn you into her race. She wanted you to be in your original state. To be human, to live as a human. Am I wrong?"

"What's so good to be a human? Also, I am not a human but a mon..." [1]

"You are a Human."

Eruru answers expressionlessly. Regarding Hisui's question, the girl did not back away from a straight answer this time.

"You are human, there are no better answers."

"...That is good."

"But sleeping next to you is definitely an authentic vampire--a [TRUE ANCESTOR]. I heard the story from her, it appear Kishida's goal was the powers within her. If that is the case, I am afraid there will be more people targeting her in the future. Extremist factions amongst the vampires might also betray her, even so, you still want to protect her?"

"She will protect herself. Also, I can't believe her to be a [True Ancestor]. The one at my home should be the last [True Ancestor], Miraluka said so herself."

Hisui's words made Eruru's eyes glow. His body, and the vampire who made him this way, all made her very excited.

"Regarding her losing her memories, I did some investigation. Right now, there are no vampires related to her. She apparently just appeared one day, She may be the first True Ancestor in modern day society. It is so mysterious. Right now all we want to do is observe her."

"....Please be merciful. Also...why not exterminate her? Right now the sun is up, all you have to do is open the window, and she is doomed right?"

"Because she is exonerated from the crime. There is no reason to exterminate her, since there is no difference between me and her. And cut to the chase, it is only because she committed no crime right now. Even if she sucked your blood, it is not a crime right now. So because she is innocent, we won't take action."

"True True..."

Looking at Hisui staring at her, Eruru gets up and begin to walk away.

"I have to go. Also..."

"Also...?"

"Thank you."

The half vampire's face turned red and left the sickroom. At the same time, Rushella woke up.

"You...are you ok?"

"Ah, um...should be..."

Hisui mumbled, and Rushella flipped herself on to the bed, sitting right next to him.

"Really...no problem? It was clear you lost so much blood."

"Eh, why are you worrying so much?"

"Of course, I am worried. You are my property after all."

"......."

"You are not allowed to do anything crazy from now on. After all...you are human."

"I was able to protect the mistress, right?"

"Even if...unacceptable. Protecting me is your duty....but...."

"But...?"

"Not allowed to die."

She spat those out, word by word. Her scarlet eyes pierced his.

"Without my permission, you are not allowed to die. Even your death belongs to me."

"But I cannot become a vampire."

"I have not given up! Someday, your body, and your soul, everything will belong to me. You will kneel before me!"

"Ok Ok..."

Even though he gave a perfunctory reply, but Rushella still came close with a hug, then brought her eyes to meet Hisui's.

"You don't want to?"

It is not like I don't want to... that thought came unbidden. But Hisui still managed to swallow it down. One cannot just easily stop being human.

Because Rushella refused to move her gaze away, Hisui could only give her a concise and honest answer.

"I will help you, find out who you are.... investigate your past; I will definitely help."

"Also have to add my dietary requirement as well. We did agree, right?"

"....Yes yes, ah, but you have to hold your end of the bargain as well, don't suck anyone else's blood."

"I know. I... know what it is like to have your blood sucked out. I can understand."

"....It is so."

"Also, you addressed me by name right? Even though you are a servant."

"That...that was forced by the situation."

Hisui wanted to just gloss over the situation, but Rushella did not appear to be angry, but only lightly replied: "I will give you special permission to do so."

"Eh?"

"I will also call you Hisui, No problem?"

".....Yes."

Watching Hisui nod in acceptance, the Vampire smiled faintly, and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"Then, Hisui."

"What, what are you doing?"

Ignoring the helpless Hisui, Rushella brought her lips close.

The two were in danger of touching each other.

But... her lips did not reach for his, but instead reached for his neck.

A lover's kiss was suppose to aim for the neck and not the lips.

"OUCH!!!! What are you doing so suddenly? I am still recovering from a great ordeal!"

"So what? I am only drinking a little bit! It was my blood anyway! I've been holding back for so long!"

Rushella licked her lips and pushed Kujou down.

Twin eyes blazed scarlet, no one could stop her anymore.

"HEY...DON'T....at least be gentle."

"So noisy, behave yourself!"

Resistance was futile, Hisui thus got pinned to the bed, and had his blood and pleas dissolved into oblivion.

"Hmm....so delicious <3"

"...Are you a Demon? Ah, clearly you are a blood sucking [DEMON]! Ahh...."[2]

Kujou was feeling Rushella's body and temperature as she cozied up to him, while he mumbled in tears.

After that, each day at the hospital meant at least one such take down.

After many days, Hisui was able to recover and return to school.

Reina appeared to be fine, and even returned to school before Kujou.

She could not recall her memories before being bitten, but something remained in her heart. After Hisui returned to school, she said: "....Thank you."

She looked extremely shy, and for some reason kept staring at him during class, and tried to start a conversation whenever possible.

It looked like a return to normal life but Rushella, enemy of normal everyday life, still smiled and chattered non-stop with him every day after school.

"You started a club?"

"Correct! If I can't find a club I want to join, I will just create my own club! Isn't it a great idea?"

"Sorry, don't be too proud of yourself. This is just a total whim of yours."

"Shut up and come with me."

Rushella dragged Hisui towards an empty classroom, it was the same place where Mei pushed him down.

There was always a dreadful feeling when he came here.

"I brought someone over!"

The vampire pushed the door open and dragged him in.

An emotionless voice greeted the two.

"You are so slow."

Without raising her head, the girl tapped away at the laptop. It was Eruru in a school uniform.

"What are you doing here!?"

"Club activity, what else?"

"Then what I should be saying is, why did you have to come here?"

"I am here to observe you. Because we don't have enough people on hand, to be able to maintain day to day contact, I decide to come to school. Do you have any questions?"

"Of course, there is the main question ahead. However, back up a bit, I understand your other words, but what do you mean club activity?"

"Unlike a carefree student like you, I still have work to do. To be able to create an area after school where I can focus my attention and energy, so

I decide to use this club activity to be it."

"Is that so..."

This girl's thinking was clearly not simple. It was better to be alert to her dissection wishes.

"Then, why are you in this club?"

Thus Kujou asked Rushella, and of course she proudly replied,

"She said as long as I don't interrupt her work, I can do whatever I want."

"Hmm, probably just to keep an eye on you. Then, why did you create this club? What is even the name of this club?"

"How bout [Blood Sucking Club]? To research better blood sucking techniques!"

"REJECTED."

"How bout dedicated to investigating my past, a [Servant's Club] that also completely dedicate itself to my day-to-day life!"

"No. I don't think the goals are bad, but the name is awful. Also, the goals are bad."

"How about child-birth club? Or a euphemism name like [Egg Laying Club] isn't a bad idea."

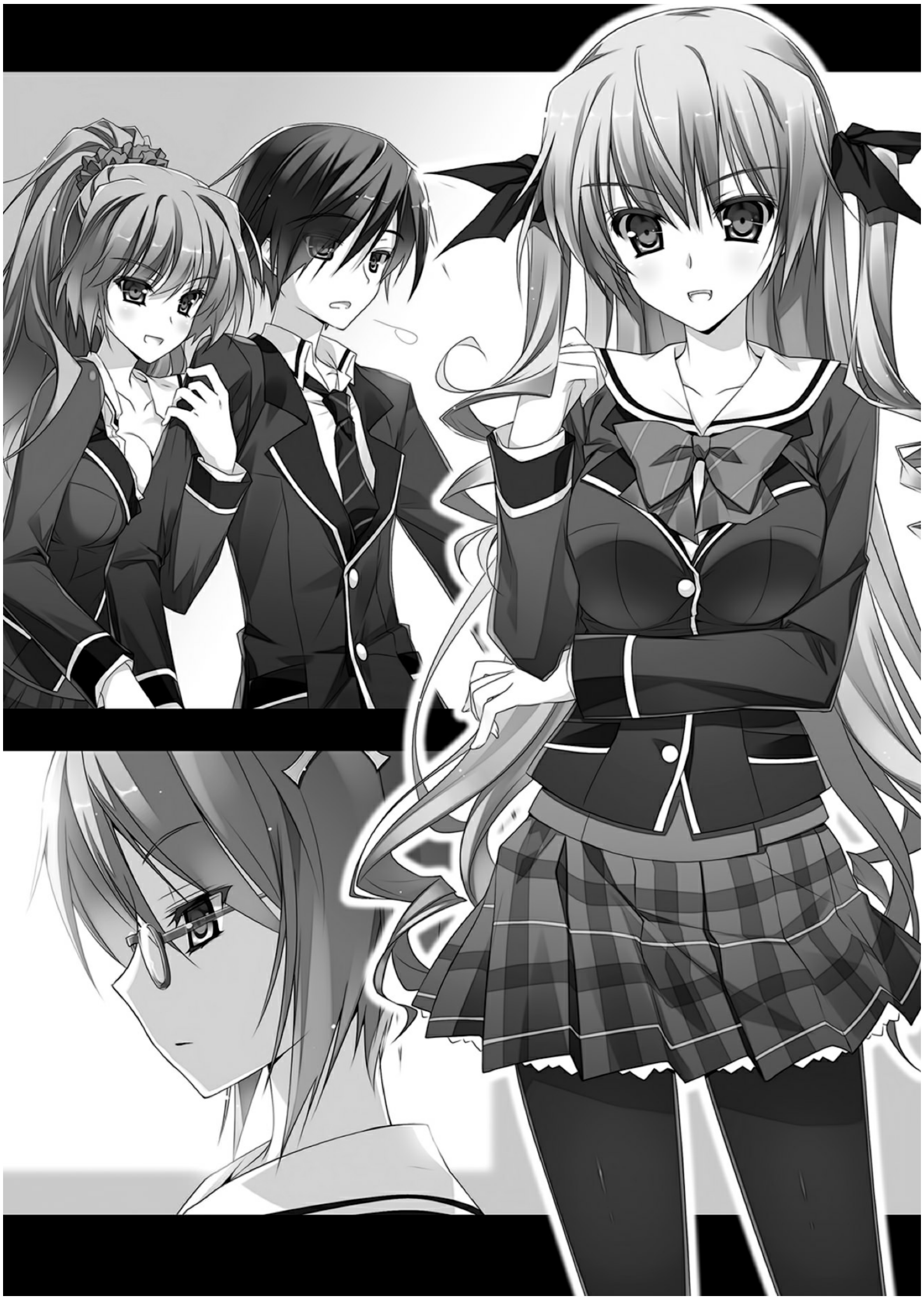
".....Why are you here?"

Kujou just realized Sudou was nearby. And grabbed on to his arm, even her chest pressured in.

As much as Hisui wanted to maintain the same posture, he could not dispel the fear of getting ravished any given moment, so he was unable to enjoy the soft sensation of her bosom.

"I am Rushella's collaborator. And also I receive a contract salary, so it is natural to be around her right?"

"Is that so?"



"Hi-kun doesn't have any idea? Regarding the club name?"

"Let's call it the Slacker's Club? Activities include [Abesh][3], or the After School Electromagnetic Wave Club?"[4]

"Kids these days are not going to catch your reference. Heh, clearly this is an occult research club, with four monsters here."

"Don't lump me in this, I am clearly human!?"

"Eruru worked hard so you can have a normal life right? And also accepted responsibility for the Kishida incident....thus, her department is under-staffed right now. Why can't you help her?"

Hisui pouted, and sat on a nearby chair.

"Ok, all the members are here, let's start discussing the upcoming activities!"

Rushella spoke with a leader like posture.

Mei looked as if she was watching a show.

Eruru silently pounded away at her keyboard.

And there was Kujou without a bit of motivation.

Surrounded by a vampire, an artificial human and a half vampire, the boy motionlessly mumbled,

"Come back quick, my normal life."

Translator's Notes and References

1. Intentionally cut off

2. In Chinese, and I also assume in Japanese as well, the literal translation for vampire is "blood sucking demon" or "blood sucking monster", in here, Hisui is trying to highlight how Rushella is truly a "monster", but I couldn't exactly break it into something like VAMPire and have the same effect

3. Abesh(あべしっ): a sound effect, famously used in the Fist of the North Star manga when an opponent dies.

4. After School Electromagnetic Wave Club(放課後電磁波クラブ): the Hōkago Denshiha Kurabu is a comedy sketch in a Japanese variety show, involving two characters, "North Pole" and "South Pole," dressed outrageously in nothing but helmets and revealing thongs while holding giant U-shaped magnets. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Downtown_no_Gottsu_Ee_Kanji]

Afterword

Hello readers, it's been a while, I'm Totsuki Yuu.

It's not because of something I can brag about like taking an energizing break or learning stuff, my work was simply delayed.

Whether readers, friends, editors or the illustrator Yasaka-san, I am sorry for making you wait.

...Okay, let's not have things too gloomy. Let's get back to the main topic, the story.

This is a rare moment, or perhaps the first time. The protagonist's basic parameters are the weakest among all the major characters.

To me, an author who believes in male supremacy, this is the newest and weakest protagonist.

I also think that the difference in protagonist this time compared to before is huge, but in a certain sense, the strongest and the weakest is actually a very thin line, different paths towards the same goal. (Probably)

Okay, because the protag is like this, I have arranged many strong females around him.

Perhaps you can't imagine from Yasaka-san's moe moe style of drawing, but they all possess grip strength on the level of gorillas, don't they?

If they were serious, dashing 100m in 9 seconds or jumping vertically over 1m would be a piece of cake.

Just as the clever readers have realized, the protag Hisui is virtually powerless to resist if any of the heroines push him down.

In the story from now on, no matter what new characters appear or how the plot develops, this basic setting will not change.

Kujou Hisui may be the protagonist but rather than a 'hero' he is a weak 'heroine.'

According to some so-called theories of the strongest, please regard Hisui's normal combat strength as "one" in this story. Because that's the standard.

Such a weak ass guy why make him the protagonist? I can almost hear these complaints. Well, that's the kind of existence protags are: even if they lose 99 battles, as long as they win in the critical moment, it's fine.

Conversely, even if someone wins 99 times but loses pitifully in the critical moment, that guy cannot work as a protag.

Losing is fine, unsightliness is fine, but shining in a critical moment, now that's a protagonist, that's Kujou Hisui... that's what I hope.

After talking about the protag, let's discuss the story's setting. This story mentions the race of 'vampires' originating roughly two thousand years ago in Europe, scared of crosses *etc*. That's the kind of setting I've used.

From an academic perspective, seeking the origins of vampires, through various legends and myths, the basic ideas could be found in very early eras, so one could say their birth far predates thousand years ago. But since the vampires are just part of this story's setting, please don't take things too seriously, dear readers.

Vampires as a category of supernatural creatures is quite broad, currently speaking, but in this story, only the heroine Rushella and her kind are defined as 'vampires.' So readers, please don't worry too much about the other definitions of vampires.

It's about time to say bye, actually when I was writing this afterword, I was in a certain kind of hellish battlefield... but anyway, this is all my own fault. (weeps)

In order to see everyone again as soon as possible, I will turn everyone's support into motivation in my battle to complete the draft.

Well then, see you next volume.

Totsuki Yuu

Illustrator's Afterword

I am Yasaka Minato, this is my first time illustrating novels for Fujimi Fantasia Bunko. Surrounded by cute heroines, I was happy throughout the illustrating process.

I still have many things I need to improve. I will be in everyone's care from now on.

Yasaka Minato

銀の十字架（クロス）とドラキュリア
Silver Cross & Draculea
II
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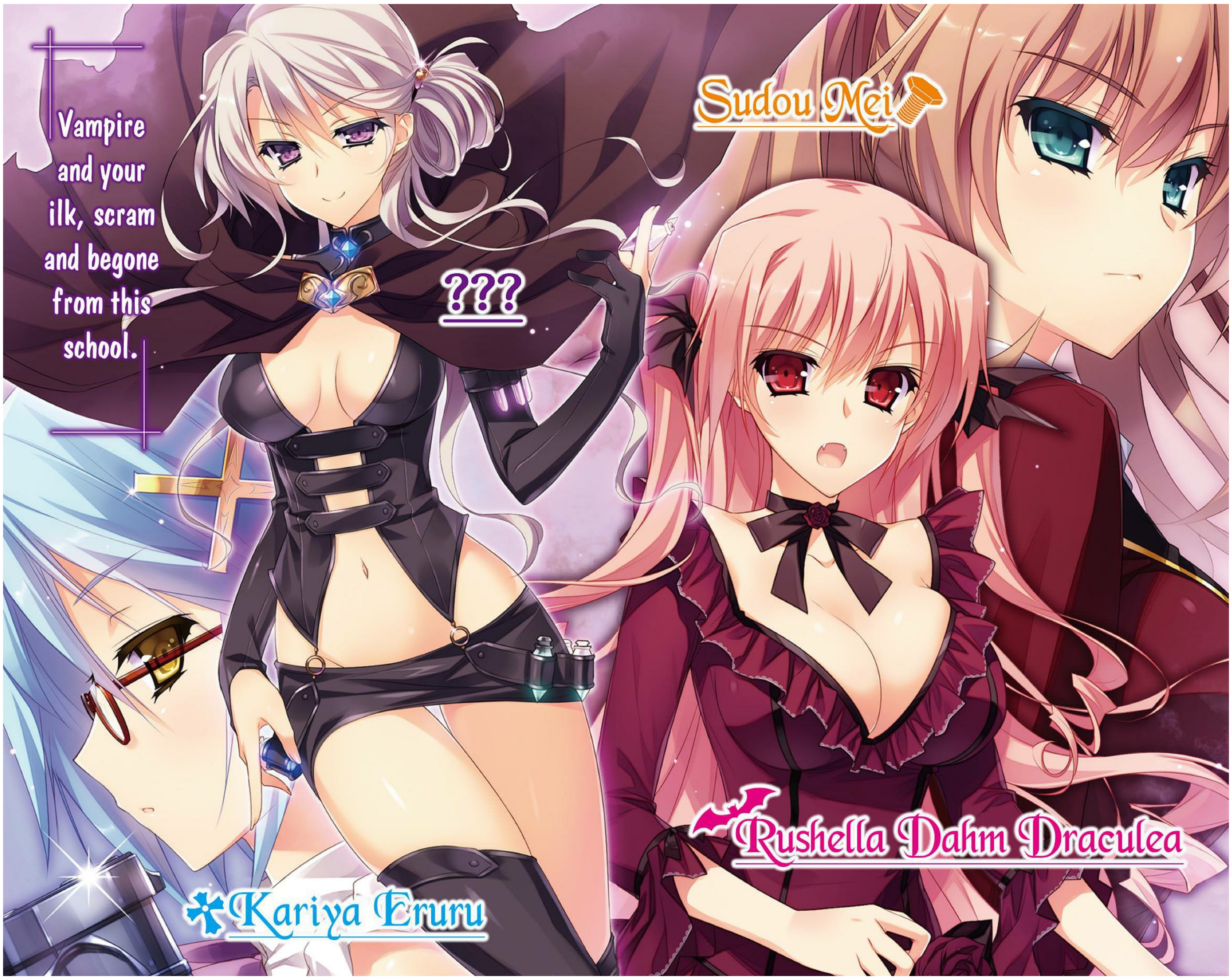
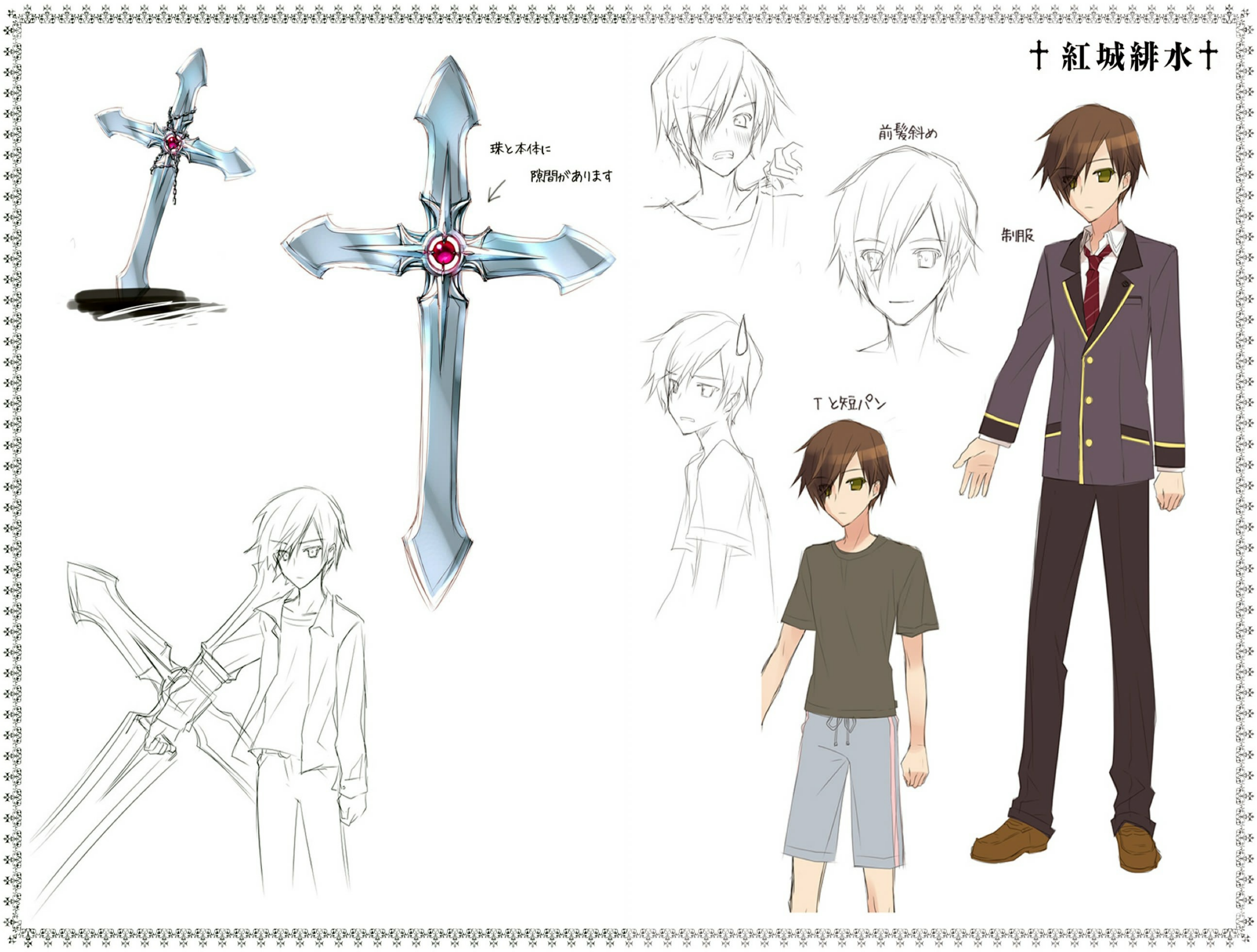
クロス


Vampire and your ilk, scram and begone from this school.
Sudou Mei
???
Rushella Dahm Draculea
Kariya Eruru

† 紅城緋水 †


珠と本体に
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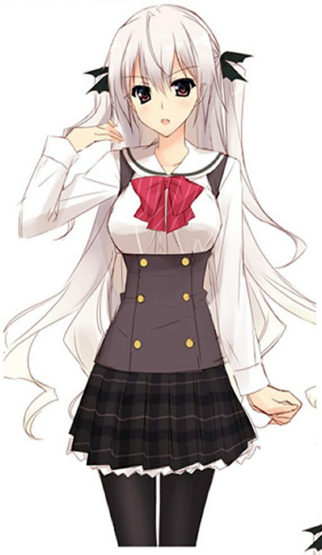
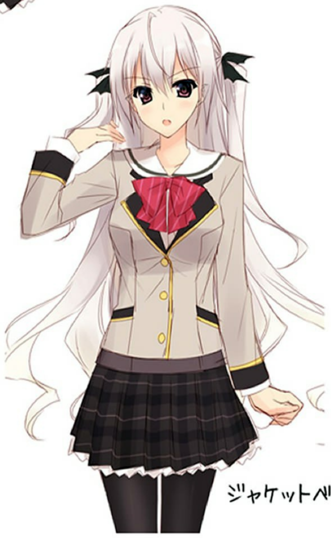
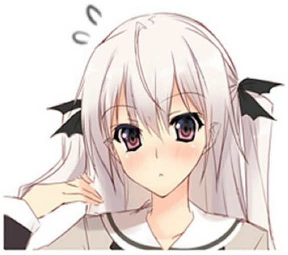
†ルシュラ=ダーム・ドラキュリア†

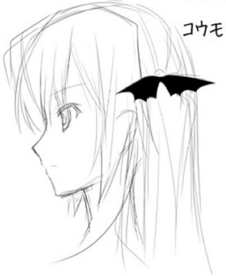
ジャケット無し



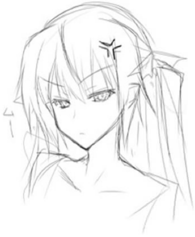


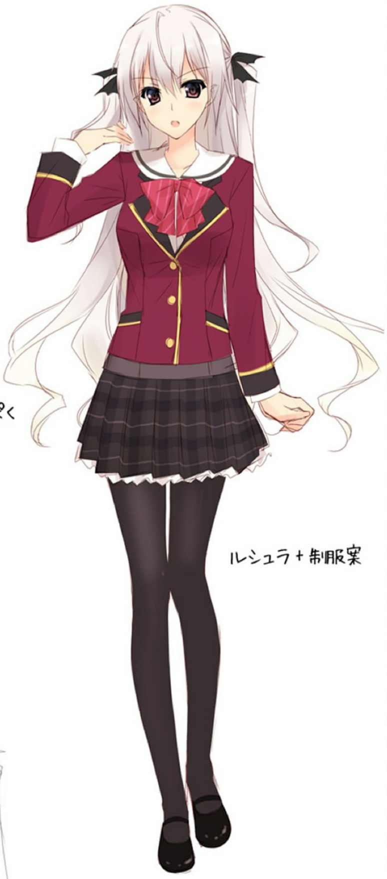
ジャケットベージュ系





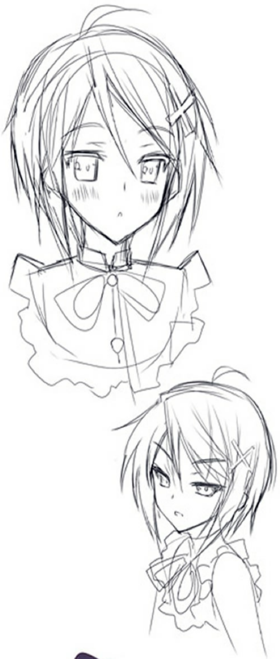
シワの形状で
コウモリの羽っぽく
見える

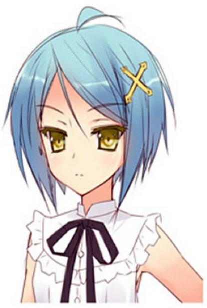




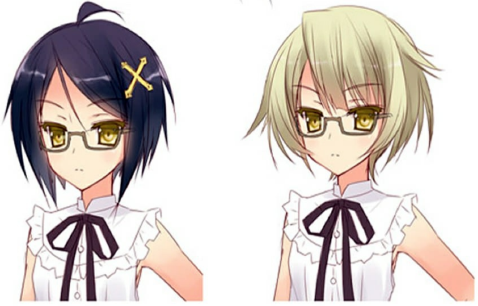
ルシュラ+制服案

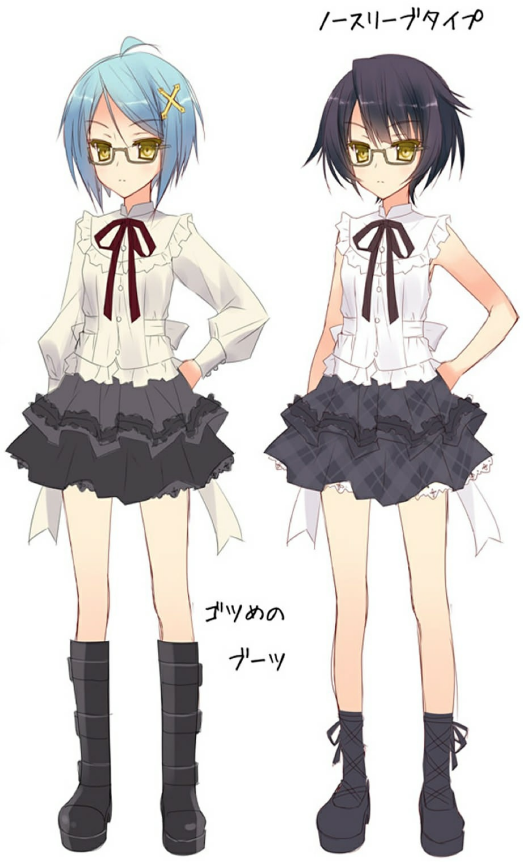
†狩夜えるる†





めがね無し




ノースリーブタイプ
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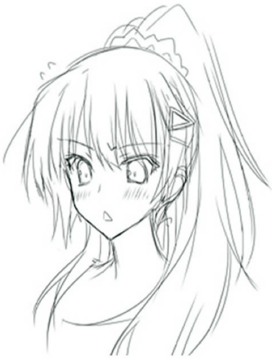
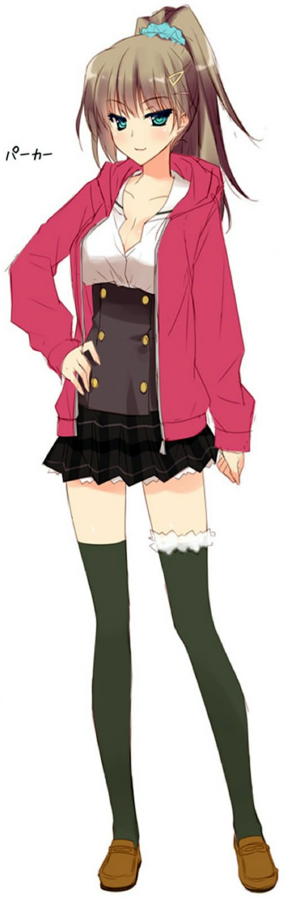
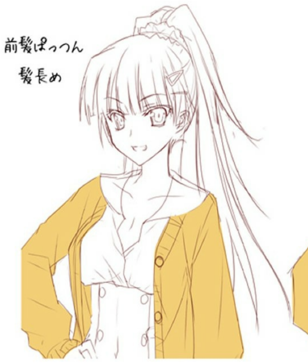
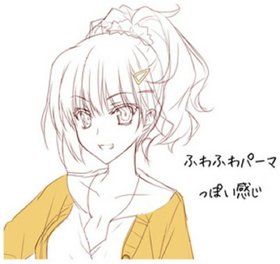
ブーツ

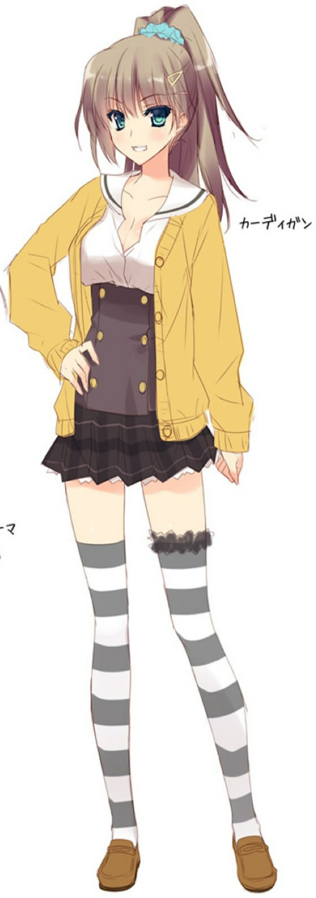
†巣道芽依†








ふわふわパーマ
っぽい感じ



Prologue

"The club is in danger of being disbanded...!"

Her dignified and beautiful face contorted with sorrow, Rushella Dahm Draculea declared to the members of the club before her.

Currently after school, the location was an empty classroom in a corner of the school building -- in other words, the club activities room.

Standing before the blackboard was the self-styled "club president" Rushella who had founded the club several weeks earlier.

Nevertheless, in all this time since the club was established, neither the club's name nor its activities had yet to be finalized.

"...All this is because you guys are negligent! Especially you!"

"Eh, me!?"

Kujou Hisui had been reading manga with his back to Rushella. Hearing himself singled out, he turned around unwillingly.

"Why are you blaming me... I didn't do anything!"

"That's exactly the problem; you're not doing anything! Furthermore, you even ignored all my suggestions... Such as giving the club a more friendly name of '○○○ Club,' or giving everyone different armbands based on their individual responsibilities, or entering the 'Inter School Writing Competition,' or setting the 'National University' as the goal, or 'welcoming midsummer,' or agreeing to a decisive match with the 'rival' during the finals in the tournament but losing to an underhanded enemy in the semifinals, or having a 'teammate' dying in a traffic accident, or 'unbelievable, for such a handsome character to be killed off'...!?"[1]

"Your suggestions are so ridiculous that I give up on retorting! Come on, the items in the second half of your list hardly count as suggestions!?"

"...By the way, isn't she learning about rather obscure things?"

Leaning against Hisui and trying to make conversation was another member of the club -- Sudou Mei.

Like Hisui, she had ignored Rushella's various suggestions and spent her days in the club classroom lazily.

"...It's probably because of her strong curiosity. In order to fill the gaps in her memory, she's been investigating all sorts of things... Unfortunately, she's not good with kanji even though she seems quite fluent with foreign books. Plus the fact she doesn't seem to like serious books, this has resulted in her being brainwashed by anime, manga, variety shows and the like..."

"...Based on the outcome, did she found the club under the influence of those things?"

"Hey, you guys over there, whispering is not allowed! Also, you are not allowed to wrap yourself around my servant's arm without my permission!"

Rushella swiftly pointed over with her finger, but Mei nonchalantly hugged Hisui tighter, bringing her lips near Hisui's little earlobe that was as cute as a girl's.

"Oh my, why does everything need your approval? Besides, when did he become your servant?"

"I bit him, so he's mine! And before coming to school today, we already shared a kiss!"

"Don't forget to add the words "Vampire's" before the word kiss. Please don't say things that could cause misunderstandings, especially in front of classmates."

Recalling the pain from this morning, Hisui instinctively reached out to the left side of his neck -- where traces of the "kiss" remained.

Normally, the only trace a kiss could leave behind... Would be a kiss mark at most.

...However, Rushella's kisses were not the harmless type.

Those were fang marks carved upon the skin by snow-white canines that one could glimpse behind those bright crimson lips of hers.

Not only that... but she also sucked blood.

Correct -- even though it was unbelievable, the girl before his eyes was a true authentic vampire.

No matter how well the high school uniform fitted her, or how well her behavior conformed to modern society -- she was still an inhuman supernatural creature.

She had bitten Hisui while he was on his way home from the high school entrance ceremony, made his home her own, and even followed him to school. And currently -- she was his master and the club president here.

"Sucking recklessly to your heart's content every single day... If it wasn't me, who knows what might happen..."

"...By the way, Hi-kun, you are getting your blood sucked every day, and yet, you're still safe and sound?"

Mei wondered as she stole a glance at Hisui's neck.

His pristine white skin was enough to shame most girls into admitting inferiority. Let alone a bite mark, there was not even a single blemish.

If blood was drawn as claimed, there should be a wound first of all.

More importantly, being bitten by a vampire implied the loss of human identity to become an inhuman supernatural creature.

Just as the ancient legends described, a person who had been bitten by a vampire would turn into a vampire too.

This was an absolute eternal rule and curse that no human could disobey.

But only Hisui was the exception.

"That's the kind of constitution I have. Let me remind you, even though I won't become a vampire and my wounds recover faster, losing blood still hurts a lot! If I suffer an instantly fatal wound, I'll still die. Because of this freeloader invading my home, I'm forced to eat a lot of liver recently for replenishing nutrients..."

"Shouldn't you take iron supplements as well? But suffering that every day is really terrible... Vampires are really troublesome!"

"Who are you calling troublesome!? My race has existed for countless eons, carrying utmost prestige for over a thousand years. You dare say something so rude? You fake human with only mere centuries' worth of history!"

"What did you say......!?"

Her berserk button having been pushed, Mei stood up.

At the same time, she slammed her hands on the table.

This was merely a natural motion which required no emphasis.

But the instant her hands left the table -- the table was split into two.

This was not because the table was originally old and worn out, or cobbled together -- it was destroyed by pure brute strength.

"...Not this again. Please stop now. Sudou, the more you do this, the further you'll be from human, you know? Could you show some mercy to the public property here please? That strength of yours cannot be compared to normal humans!"

"I didn't choose this body. Besides, isn't this already a lot better than before?"

...Saying that, Mei pulverized the ballpoint pen in her hand.

Had it simply snapped into two, it could still be considered a show of strength.

But for her light grip to turn the pen into fine powder, this had completely surpassed the human realm.

More accurately, she was no longer human. No matter how seductive or tempting her appearance.

In other words, like Rushella, Mei was actually an inhuman supernatural creature.

A perfect creature made in the image of mankind and meant to surpass humanity. But for some reason, be it God's joke or the devil's curse, it was born as an ugly monster. Mei happened to be the descendant of the infamous Frankenstein's monster.

"Hmph, no matter how you disguise yourself, a fake is a fake. Ultimately, you cannot become human!"

"...Shut up, I don't care what you think. My wish is precisely to become human! To become one with a human... Or I should say, have babies with Hi-kun❤"

"Sorry, no can do."

Hisui shook his head expressionlessly.

If she kept hugging tighter, he really would be at risk of injury. That's Sudou Mei for you.

"Why? You're already getting your blood sucked by that vampire every day, right!? Coudn't you inject a little white liquid into me as well!?"

"Umm sorry, could you stop these blatant pornographic descriptions!? And of course the answer is no!"

"I forbid you to ignore me! Also, hugging together is not allowed!"

Rushella squeezed herself into the fray.

Things were always this chaotic around the three of them. Club activities probably failed to make progress thanks to that.

But like always, the situation was brought under control by the monotonous voice of the final member.

"...I have no objections to quarreling, but if you really want to stop the club from being disbanded, you people should think of a plan more seriously, right?"

The speaker was named Kariya Eruru.

Distanced from the noisy ruckus, she had been sitting in a corner of the classroom, staring at a notebook computer without a word, tapping audibly on the keyboard nonstop.

Her face was as cute and adorable as a French doll, but her cold manner of speaking was completely emotionless in tone.

"There's not much time remaining. If you want to continue using this classroom, the club must first be categorized and all sorts of content need to be edited. How about a more serious discussion?"

" " "......Yes......" " "

Her irrefutable suggestion silenced the other three.

Returning to their own seats, they began to recall the cause of the incident.

Speaking of the club disbandment crisis, one must begin with a particular question someone posed.

Translator's Notes and References:

1. The latter portion of Rushella's list is a reference to the baseball manga Touch.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Touch_(manga)]

Chapter 1 - Monster Meeting

"...By the way, I do not recall authorizing this kind of club?"

The quartet was casually doing their own thing in the "club activities room" as usual when a girl suddenly visited and declared.

Viewing the surprised quartet with disdain, she continued even more mercilessly.

"So, please relinquish this place as soon as possible. You do realize you are occupying a classroom illegally, right?"

"Why!? Why was my club not authorized? All we're missing is confirming the name and the activities description, right!?"

"Let me say this, in that case, you guys do not even qualify as a hobby group, let alone a club!"

Before the other three could even retort, the girl already answered Rushella directly on their behalf.

This person exuded an aura of dignity that differed from Rushella. With gently wavy hair coiled behind her head, she was dressed in her uniform in a fashionable yet strictly rule-abiding manner. An existence that no one in the school was unaware of.

Student Council Vice-President, Uno Kirika.

Having joined the student council as a first year, she was now a second year high school student. In the last election, she was able to ascend to the position of vice-president.

From the brief introductory exchange earlier, it was readily apparent that her personality was harsh, uncompromising and dutiful. Consequently, the complete lack of support from the female students resulted in her losing the bid for the president position. At the same time, due to her combination of beauty, talent and upfront ways, her approval rating amongst male students was reportedly the highest in the history of the school.

Amongst the current student council members, due to her being the only one with past experience on the council as well as her business-like personality, rumors speculated that she was the actual boss running the show.

Faced with her merciless announcement, Rushella was the first to object.

"What is going on!? Why can't you approve our club!?"

"What is going on? Because there is no paper trail. Besides, how do you even plan on applying with neither name nor content confirmed? Are these not questions that come before approval? Furthermore, you do realize the challenges of starting a club from scratch like this? Even if you do get approved, more than likely you will end up as a hobby group with neither club classroom nor club budget."

A completely correct explanation.

Even without her dignity as an upperclassman and as the Student Council Vice-President, her reasoning was flawless.

"Mmmmmmm... You dare speak to me in such a manner..."

"Excuse me, but she does bring up good points. By the way, did you even fill out the application? Based on common sense, shouldn't the name and activities be confirmed first before the club is established?"

Hisui's questioning made Rushella display a displeased expression.

"I already told the principal! I ran over to his office and declared 'I shall create a new club!!' Then with a blank stare, he answered 'All shall proceed as you wish...' He approved it!!"

"Clearly you used your 'mystic eyes' to force him to agree!! That's even worse than gaming the system!!"

"Shut up, if the boss already agreed, there's no problem, right!?"

"I say, even if we do it your way... The effect of 'mystic eyes' only lasts for a day, right!? Forcing your way into high school, having to run over to the principal's office to use the 'mystic eyes' every single day would be too much, which was why I asked Kariya to take care of the proper paperwork..."

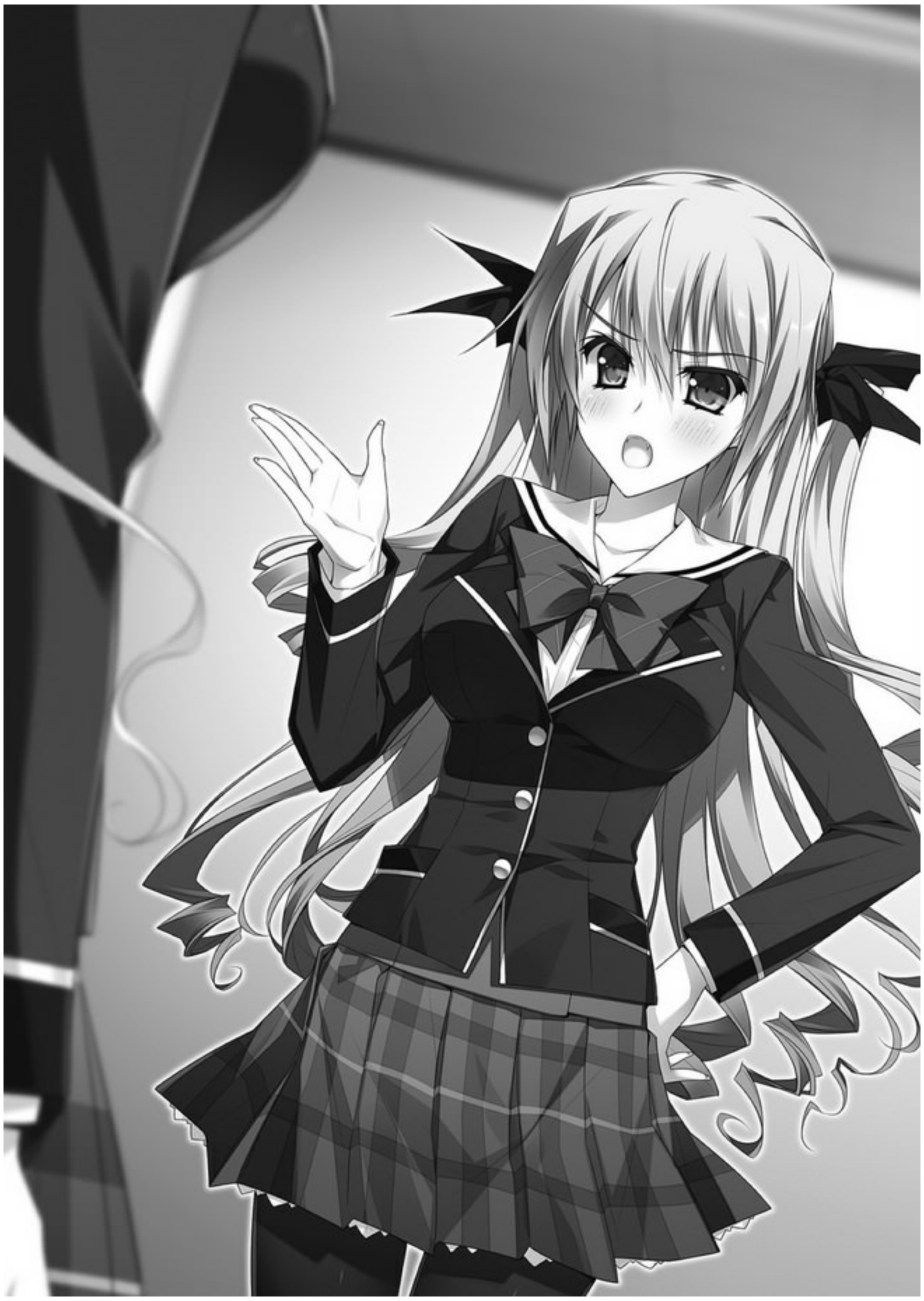
"Hmm... Well then, can't the club be dealt the same way..."

"You must create the club properly in accordance with school rules. It would be too conspicuous if we meddled in this affair. Even though it would be troublesome for us if your area of movement expands after school, we cannot assist in this matter."

Eruru asserted expressionlessly.

Under normal circumstances, she seldom spoke to the group, but her words were always merciless when she did.

After all, she was only attending this school for the purpose of monitoring Rushella and Hisui.



Belonging to an undisclosed division of the Metropolitan Police Department, as a special consultant to the Supernatural Investigations Section and as an expert in vampire combat -- this was Kariya Eruru's identity.

Hearing Eruru's flat rejection, Hisui ignored Rushella's pouting and had no choice but to attempt negotiations with Kirika.

"So, the matter of the club aside... Why did you come here?"

"Even though our school was affected by the declining birthrate and decreasing trends in student numbers in the past, enrollment has increased in recent years due to the redevelopment of the station area. This in and of itself poses no issue. But at the same time, the problem of clubs operating with a lack of transparency gradually surfaced. My visit here today, could be described as for the purpose of investigations."

"...What do you mean?"

"Sports clubs are basically fine, but we have problems getting a grasp on the number of cultural clubs and hobby groups as well as their membership. Some of them are disbanded in reality and yet they continue to be allocated a budget. There are also chaotic cases of multiple hobby groups carrying out similar activities. Even more outrageously, there are clubs whose activities and existence are unknowns. Given someone malicious, one could easily embezzle the school's club budget under the guise of other clubs."

"...I see. That really is a problem."

"Many teachers who were once club advisors have left the school for various reasons such as retirement or quitting. To be honest, the school administration has no way of finding out the actual situation of all the clubs. Hence, the student council has decided to conduct an investigation. Do you understand now?"

"...I understand."

There was clearly no room for negotiations.

Handled carelessly, this issue could end up making the entire school their enemy.

"Even if classrooms may be currently unused, in consideration of greater student numbers in the future, we must start managing them so that they can be distributed in a disciplined manner as the need arises. Or perhaps, once the club investigation is complete, the classrooms can be returned to the school administration, to be assigned to officially recognized clubs... In any case, we cannot let you use this classroom for completely unproductive activities of a group that does not even qualify as a club."

"...Lowly human, you dare speak in this manner to an exalted vampire such as me... Well then, by my 'mystic eyes,' thou shalt obey...!"

Faced with Kirika's high tension attack, Rushella who had kept silent all this time suddenly murmured horrifying words.

Alarmed, Hisui frantically pulled her hand and tried to soothe her.

"Idiot, stop it... Even if you drive her away right now, she's going to return, right?"

"It is as Kujou-san stated. Even if you use the 'mystic eyes' to control her alone, there would be too many targets once the entire student council and teaching staff are on the move. Besides, the effect of 'mystic eyes' does not last long enough, resulting in a vicious cycle, would you not agree? Badly handled, you may even expose your identity."

Eruru restrained Rushella's rage with words of reason.

Unable to object, Rushella had no choice but to stand still, clenching her fist.

"...Just as I have said, if you do not have any further matters, please hurry and..."

"Ah, wait a minute, Senpai!"

Just as Kirika was about to end the conversation, Mei joined in.

"We understand the situation now, but isn't it kind of mean to throw us out like this? Even though an unofficial club or hobby group unrecognized by the school is not proper, but honestly, though we appear to be accompanying our club president who's a little unfortunate in the brains department while we pretend to engage in club activities, in reality, all we do is chat around."

"Hey... I don't quite get what you mean by that, but surely you're speaking ill of me, right...?"

Ignoring Rushella's terrifying teeth-gnashing behind her, Mei continued:

"...Conversely, what we're doing does not cause trouble to anybody. There is no school rule forbidding students from chatting in classrooms after school, right?"

Completely unproductive.

Inane to the extreme.

Utterly worthless.

Simply stated, they were killing time.

Precisely because of that, they were not bound by any rules.

Mei was countering using the tragic truth, an act of merciless practicality.

At the very least, until the classroom was assigned an official purpose -- they wished to remain here.

Presumably seeing through Mei's intentions, Kirika relaxed her tone of voice and answered.

"...True. Indeed there is no such rule. However, the rules do advise: students who have nothing to do should leave school promptly, but enforcing that sort of thing is unnecessary. Rather than obeying meaningless rules, there would be more value in improving them."

"You agree, right? So, we can..."

"...The reason I came here today is not only for the purpose of investigating clubs and classroom usage. Recently in the past week, the student council's complaints box was stuffed with anonymous letters concerning this empty classroom after school."

"Anonymous letters... What did they say?"

Hisui was the first to ask as the quartet wondered in puzzlement.

Kirika looked at them as if sizing them up, then continued.

"Let me see... The first letter -- a busty beauty had pushed a slender male student down on the ground, licking his neck with her tongue... That was the eyewitness account. Others have mentioned occurrences of pouncing to bite and lick the neck, or hardcore situations that rival bedscenes from foreign movies."

"What are you talking about...!? In this place of learning, such unwholesome and immoral acts!!"

"I'm sorry, but they're talking 100% about you. It must be that time when PE class taught basketball in the gym where you don't have to worry about sunlight. Hence you were in extremely high spirits, saying whatever 'I'm tired and want to suck blood! Hurry and let me suck!!' Then after school you came for a heavy meal of blood, remember?"

Rushella displayed great indignance as Hisui retorted in amazement.

Even though this classroom was relatively remote and unfrequented, due to Hisui's desperate resistance, it was possible that people came to check out the noise.

"There is more. A pony-tailed beauty, far surpassing high school students in sexiness, was guiding a slender male student's hand towards her chest, thighs and even up her skirt. That seductive body was all over him like performing a pole dance or something."

"Wow... For something like that to occur in a school. This person is even worse than a nymphomaniac!"

"I'm sorry, but they're talking 100% about you. It must be that time, when you were saying 'Once a month, there's always this time when I'm consumed with desire' and pounced on me, right? That force and momentum almost crushed me so I couldn't breathe, you were trying to take my virginity that day, weren't you?"

As Mei displayed exasperation, Hisui retorted with a twisted face.

Thanks to Rushella's arrival, his virginity remained untouched. After that, the sparks of war were ignited between the two girls. The scene was like a tournament for the throne of the strongest supernatural creature. It was possible that people came to check out the noise.

"In addition, a slender male student was sighted being beaten up ferociously by a female student even shorter and smaller than him. Despite the male student's apologies and pleas for mercy, the girl continued relentlessly, finally stomping him into the ground."

"How scary. Well, given the victim of assault still counts as male, how utterly useless and incompetent is he?"

"I'm sorry, but they're talking 100% about you. It must be that time, I was trying to stop Rushella and Sudou from arguing and was sent flying when they crashed into me. I ended up touching your chest due to some irresistible force of fate. It was a total accident, but you beat me up mercilessly, remember?"

Hisui retorted, his face completely pale.

He could recall his painful screams, so it was possible that people came to check out the noise.

"Also there are many instances similar to the likes of 'Riajuu Kujou must die.' 'Kujou is an idiot.' 'I'm not jealous of him!!' In addition there were even ones like 'By the way, wouldn't you agree that... Hisui is sort of cute?' 'To be frank, if I were to be alone with that kid... Dangerous.' 'Honestly... Does gender matter actually?' 'Hey... Can you do it... With me?' That sort of stuff."

"Scary!! Hey, what the heck is with the later ones!? What kind of attitude towards me is that!? Of course, I don't want to be the public enemy, but those gazes are even more terrifying! Umm, what the heck are these people complaining about!?"

"In order to safeguard personal privacy, no such details may be disclosed."

"Hey hey hey! My virginity is at stake here! Besides, isn't it a bad thing for your student council as well!?"

"Impure heterosexual relations aside, the school rules say nothing about impure homosexual relations. As for matters of conduct related to 'B' and 'L,' the student council's official position is a policy of noninterference."

Kirika's final blow crushed Hisui's hopes completely.

Collapsing to sit on the ground, powerless, he clutched his head in his arms.

Without even glancing at him, Kirika continued to speak mercilessly to the other three who were rooted to the spot.

"In any case, I forbid you to use this classroom. If you want to engage in club activities, you must abide by the school rules to the letter: gather at least five members, confirm the club's name and activities, then confirm the teacher advisor and finally apply to the student council through proper procedures. We will go through careful consideration, making sure there is no overlap with other club activities, as well as ensure a positive theme, only then will the formal approval process begin. That is all I have to say, any further questions?"

"...None."

Hisui answered dejectedly on behalf of the whole group.

In actual fact, neither Mei nor Eruru were affected very much.

Only Rushella had her face turned away in disgust.

"Well then, you are dismissed. If you have nothing to do, please leave the school promptly."

Concluding with great solemnity, Student Council Vice-President Uno Kirika left.

And so, before it could even begin officially, the club was facing a disbandment crisis.

The next day, Hisui's group of four gathered once again in the empty classroom to discuss how to handle the crisis.

"......By the way, it's only been a day, and yet we're running over to this classroom again, isn't it kind of bad? That vice-president is famous for doing things strictly. Combined with her academic excellence and integrity of character, she's essentially the representative of the teachers, right? If we oppose her like this, aren't we going to get the short end of the stick?"

"I agree. Besides, why are you so obsessed with the club?"

Hisui and Mei were uninterested in the club in the first place. With zero enthusiasm, they asked Rushella.

"It's all your fault for putting in no effort! Whether assisting me in school life, or seriously investigating clues to my memories, why aren't you people showing me some enthusiasm!?"

"Even if I don't do the club, I've been taking care of your living space and all sorts of daily chores, and we really have been working hard on the matter of your memories, right?"

Living a wonderful life of cohabitation with the beautiful vampire, Hisui sought agreement from Eruru beside him.

Immersed in her notebook computer as always, she nodded lightly after hearing Hisui's question.

"We of the Supernatural Investigations Section are working on it full time. But we are already short on numbers, so our efforts have not bore fruit. Anyway, we did pick up rumors of vampires in this area."

"What, there are others of my kin around here!?"

Hearing Eruru's statement, not only Rushella but also Hisui and Mei leaned closer to listen.

"Yes -- or perhaps 'yes, in the past' would be more accurate. Many eyewitness reports indicate, in the past decade, there was once a woman with extremely pale skin who wore black gloves even in midsummer to prevent exposure to sunlight. Even though most witnesses saw her at night, but summing up the various accounts -- her face was beautiful enough to make one's heart stop momentarily. Despite wearing sunglasses in most situations, her beauty still left a vivid impression on others. Reportedly, some have even witnessed her 'unobscured face' when she took off her shades at night, and they have asserted -- such beauty could only belong to the heavens."

"Mmmmmmm... Based on her beauty, indeed she must be my kin -- or rather, she is more than likely of the same blood. Any other characteristics!?"

"Vivid blood-red lips, eyes that appeared crimson on occasion, as well as dazzling white skin -- basically the appearance of a classic vampire. Reportedly, she always brought a parasol with her, and considering her unusual style of dress, the possibility of being your kin is rather high. Other eyewitnesses have described her appearance as age twenty or so. Over the past decade, all reports of her age have stated the same thing."

"No change in appearance over ten years... In other words, she is an immortal unaging vampire? Really, in this area..."

Mei also exclaimed as she nodded.

Even though Rushella's claims of suddenly waking up in a coffin in the mountains was quite unbelievable, at least it was certain that a member of her race existed in this area.

"Are there any further descriptions of that woman, any other details? If we investigate this thoroughly, perhaps it might be related to my memories!"

"Ultimately these are all eyewitness accounts. Of course, some were summed up after cross examination, but there was nothing in regards to your origins. However, there were several testimonies that stood out."

"What!?"

Rushella leaned forward to ask, but Eruru answered indifferently.

"In most situations, she was not alone... A companion was sighted. According to the earliest accounts, she was leading by the hand a child who appeared five years old or younger."

"...Could that child also be my kin!?"

"No, according to later testimonies, that child showed signs of growing up. Based on appearance and build, it should be the same person accompanying that woman."

"A human who stays by the side of my kin...!? This person is rather concerning... Who on earth could it be!?"

"...I'm sorry, that child is most likely me."

Hisui raised his hand with a pained expression on his face.

Confronted with this suddenly revealed truth, all eyes focused on him.

"It's you...? Then who is that alleged vampire..."

"...Most likely my foster parent. She was aware that her eternal youth would be easily discovered, so she tried as much as possible to avoid being seen... Nevertheless, it looks like her efforts were in vain."

Hisui smiled wryly, his tone of voice helpless.

Subtly hidden was also a sliver of sadness, but the other three noticed.

Hisui was the only pure human present -- however, he was also different from ordinary humans in one special area.

He was raised by a vampire.

When he was young, he was about to be murdered by his parents when that certain vampire killed his parents to rescue him from his unfair fate, thereupon taking up the responsibility of nurturing him.

Savior, parents' murderer, foster parent who raised him -- vampire.

In the end, she met her demise to save Hisui's life.

"I guessed it was something like that. After all, most eyewitness accounts took place around your house. Most likely, it was when you accompanied the vampire late at night for walks?"

"...Don't people inevitably feel like going to the convenience store or visiting a roadside ramen stall on whim at night? Apparently, vampires also have similar habits."

Hisui shifted his gaze away and muttered.

His nostalgic tone of voice was truly filled with the kind of affection one held for a loved one.

"...Hmph, my hopes were raised thinking you had found some kind of clue, but it turns out to be this inane and stupid thing."

Rushella displayed undisguised anger.

Mei frantically tried to smooth things over with an honest question.

"...But the vampire who raised Hi-kun might not necessarily be unrelated to you, right? You both appeared in the same area, and even though you missed each other due to separation of time, you both lived in the same house. Doesn't this imply some sort of blood relation?"

"No no no. They are completely unlike in appearance. If you had to force a comparison, their only commonalities are that massive bust and arrogant attitude. Furthermore, the person in question said she had no blood relatives."

Hisui denied flatly.

Failing in her bid for harmony, Mei could only shrug. On the other hand, Rushella continued to face Hisui with a stiff expression.

"An otherworldly beauty, and yet you say she is completely unlike me in appearance, what do you mean by that? Are you trying to say that I am such a super otherworldly beauty that even that otherworldly beauty does not even come close?"

"I think standards of beauty are very subjective, but in terms of attractiveness and common sense... My foster parent definitely beats you."

Hisui once again asserted directly. Immediately realizing he said something wrong, he entered a defensive pose.

Defense readied... The attack never arrived.

Rushella turned her face just like that and walked back to her original position, not even giving him a glance.

"...What is going on?"

Hisui asked Mei beside him.

"I dunno~"

From her tone of voice, she was clearly pretending.

But Hisui was still clueless, scratching his head, he awkwardly stated their future direction.

"In any case, regarding your memories and past, we will continue investigating as before... But there's no need to do it as a club, right? It's not like the school has any clues."

Hisui's reasonable analysis caused Rushella's gaze to wander.

Her voice much more timid than before, she asked:

"You... Is it because of that? You have something else you want to do... Another club?"

"No, not at all... I did mention I'd hoped to join the 'Go Home' club, right?"

"...But, umm... You could have changed your mind and joined some other club, couldn't you?"

Arrogant and self-centered just earlier, she was now looking up at Hisui with pleading eyes -- as if afraid to anger him.

But Hisui failed to notice the change in Rushella and simply answered indifferently.

"Well...... If I happened to run into friends with similar interests and they invite me...... I would consider it. Ah, but I'm no good with sports clubs. As for cultural ones, I'd simply turn into a member in name only. But if I do that, I suspect that vice-president's gonna drag me off to be disciplined. Honestly, I'd prefer to get a part time job. Or maybe get a driving license to buy a motorcycle or something."

"...W-Well what about, are you going to shack up with that fake or some other woman to get all lovey-dovey whatever..."

"Huh? Something like that...... Well I can't deny that I wouldn't want a girlfriend. But it's not like we have to make out all the time... Simply walking home after school together, that kind of feeling like couples is..."

Just as Hisui imagined all sorts of fulfilling images of school life, Mei and Eruru sighed as they shook their heads.

"I knew it!! That is why you treat me like some low priority, right!?"

"Huh!? I didn't say that......"

"I-In any case, don't forget you are my servant, so you have to follow me properly after school! You hear that!? Participate in the club properly with me!!"

Rushella pressed forward.

Even though she was intimidating, Hisui decided to strike back against this unreasonable master.

"Then what do you want me to do!? And why do you have to keep talking like I have to be alone with you!? You want me to be following behind you, serving you at your beck and call after school!?"

Hearing his words, Rushella instantly blushed.

"U-Umm......"

Her intimidating aura instantly vanished for some unknown reason, Rushella lowered her gaze and began to fidget with her fingers.

"Actually, you must be planning to do something to me, right!? What do you want to do to me after school!?"

Rushella could not help but retreat from Hisui's interrogation.

"I-It's not like I want to do something to you, I mean..."

"You mean?"

"J-Just......"

"Just?"

Hisui took a step forward.

Now their separation was the same as every morning -- in other words, the intimately close distance where his blood could be sucked at any instant.

Even though they were so close they could feel each other's breath, Hisui did not move, in order to look Rushella straight in the face.

"......S-Shut up!! You're not allowed to disobey me! You are my servant, just stay by my side and that's it!!"

"Huh!? What the heck!?"

Just as Hisui inclined his head in puzzlement, Rushella returned to her usual attitude.

Her face blushing, she looked towards Hisui with trepidation -- and then at the two girls beside him.

The other two girls remained silent and simply gazed at Rushella with a certain expression of amazement.

As fellow girls, they understood Rushella's feelings.

There was a sense of resonance and sympathy between them.

Using easily understood terms, it was --

This girl really said it out.

That seemed to be what the two girls' eyes were saying in concert.

"S-Stop it, you're not allowed to look at me with that kind of gaze!"

"...It's fine, I didn't hear anything."

"The room seems a bit hot and stuffy, let us open the window for a bit."

The two girls tried hard to feign ignorance.

But even Hisui could tell they were subtly suppressing laughter.

"Oooh, ooooooooooooh~~!!"

Wailing, her voice failing her, Rushella rushed out the door.

"Ah, where are you going!?"

"S-Shut up, don't you dare follow!? I absolutely forbid you to chase after me!?"

Then she ran at full speed through the corridor, rushing away into the distance.

Presently, still stunned by the aftershock of Rushella's sprinting departure, Hisui sat back down on his seat completely puzzled.

"What the heck is up with her..."

"She's simply... Possessive. Don't people always love to tie up their pets with leashes?"

Mei answered as if she understood.

Her words felt rather stinging to Hisui's ears.

"I still don't get it. What, you're trying to say, that girl not only treats me as food but also a pet to toy with!?"

Hisui asked, his face pallid. Mei simply shrugged and asked Eruru:

"Eruru, did you hear his statement just now?"

"Yes, I heard it of course, Sudou-san. What utterly worthless trash he is."

"Hey, what are you two talking about!? Did I do something to that girl!?"

"...Despite hating vampires with a passion, I still sympathize with her as a fellow member of the fairer sex. You are essentially like a favorite doll that one wishes to hug all day. Her feelings are simply an extension of that."

"Eh, I'm now an inanimate object instead!? What dignity do I have!?"

"That sort of thing never existed anywhere on your person from day one. From the day you were born."

"My entire life from birth has been disregarded completely!?"

"Since she left, I will be going. You two better hurry up and leave as well, or else the vice president will give another lecture."

Eruru shut off her computer and stood up.

Hisui and Mei exchanged glances and got ready to leave school.

With that, no solution was reached for the club disbandment crisis -- before the club ruled by the vampire even began officially, it was already on the verge of natural demise.

"...Why are you following me?"

"No particular reason."

Eruru questioned with displeasure but Hisui continued to follow her with a nonchalant expression.

Rushella had run off while Mei went home as usual.

But Eruru continued staying behind in school.

Hence Hisui started following her.

Their distance was too close to be considered tailing, but neither were they walking together as there was clear separation between them.

"If you have no business then go home? By the way, is it fine for you not to chase after her?"

"She told me not to follow, right? So why should I waste the effort..."

"There is a saying 'Do not push the button, absolutely do not push the button.' Have you heard of it?"

"Huh? I said, even if I caught up to her, she'll definitely show a bad attitude, perhaps even resorting to punching and kicking, in the worst case I'll get my blood sucked..."

"I am not going to refute your speculation, but if you do not chase after her, I fear even greater trouble will come of it."

"I will call you if I run into trouble, I'm relying on you to save me.

Remember to bring a gun and silver bullets."

"I will first blacklist your cellphone number."

"...You never told me your number in the first place, right?"

Physically they were within arm's reach, but there was clearly an unbridgeable gulf between them.

On one side was the boy who was raised by a vampire and currently a vampire's servant. On the other was the half-vampire who hated vampires with a passion. Essentially, the two were completely incompatible.

"You should know your boundaries and stop following me, okay? I am about to call the police."

"You are the police, right? Anyway, you were the first to say you're leaving, but why are you still in school?"

"This has nothing to do with you. Is that your reason for following me?"

"You...... Did you really come clean with everything you discovered in your investigations about that girl?"

The mood instantly tensed.

Eruru turned around and coldly glared at Hisui.

"...Are you calling me a liar?"

"Even if you didn't lie, I'm sure you didn't offer the whole truth."

Hisui immediately retorted.

Although he did not believe Eruru was one to deceive casually, expecting her to be honest and upfront with a vampire was an entirely different matter.

"Your small-minded cleverness remains the same as always. Is that what you followed me in order to ask?"

"Another thing... You took part in today's PE class, right?"

"Huh...? What about it?"

She could not tell what Hisui was getting at.

Eruru did indeed participate in the PE class in the afternoon.

The class only consisted of simple outdoor exercises.

Mainly running, which could be rather strenuous, but there was nothing special about it.

"Is it that strange for me to go to PE class? Granted, my duties consist of monitoring you two rather than going to class, but precisely because of that, I must play the role of the student properly. Attending a mere PE class should be perfectly natural, right?"

"...That freeloader who lives with me, watched without participating in PE class today."

"Of course, given the bright and sunny weather, how do you expect a vampire to be active?"

A perfectly logical answer.

Rushella opting out of PE class was only natural.

She hated sunlight because it was her fatal weakness.

Correct -- sunlight was the bane of vampires.

Well then -- what about someone who inherited half the bloodline?

What about a half-vampire, born from the union of a human and a vampire? In other words, Kariya Eruru?

"You haven't been looking well lately. Are you getting enough sleep?"

"Unlike a carefree student like you, I am extremely busy. Do not underestimate civil servants..."

Before she could finish her sentence, Eruru halted in her steps.

Her vision unsteady, her consciousness gradually faded.

That pale complexion of hers, even whiter than Hisui's, proceeded to lose further color of blood.

Seeing Eruru faint and collapse, Hisui caught her tiny body in time before she struck the floor.

"...Like I was saying."

Eruru's last image before she lost consciousness was Hisui's face, full of concern.

"......?"

Upon waking up, Eruru found herself lying on a bench behind the school building.

The bench was located in a shaded spot beneath some trees. Even during the daytime it would be quite dark, and there was virtually no sunlight after school due to the foliage.

"You're awake?"

Hisui's voice instantly brought her back to her senses.

Surveying the surroundings, she could see the sun was still up in the sky despite the change in scenery, hence, not much time should have passed.

Most likely, she had only fainted for a matter of minutes.

Then while she was unconscious... Hisui brought her here.

"What are your intentions!? To think you would kidnap a girl... Could you be!?"

"......What strange things are you imagining? I only helped you a bit by bringing you somewhere out of direct sunlight. Or perhaps -- you'd prefer if I took you to the infirmary and explained everything to the teacher?"

Hisui's words rendered Eruru silent.

He had made the correct decision.

Bringing her here was indeed the most appropriate measure she approved.

"Looks like you probably know why you fainted. Please take better care of your health."

"......"

Even though she knew Hisui was worrying about her, these words only reminded Eruru of her constitution, causing her to grit her teeth and avoid eye contact.

Half-vampires' characteristic -- like vampires, they were afraid of sunlight.

Their bodies would not turn to ash on contact with sunlight.

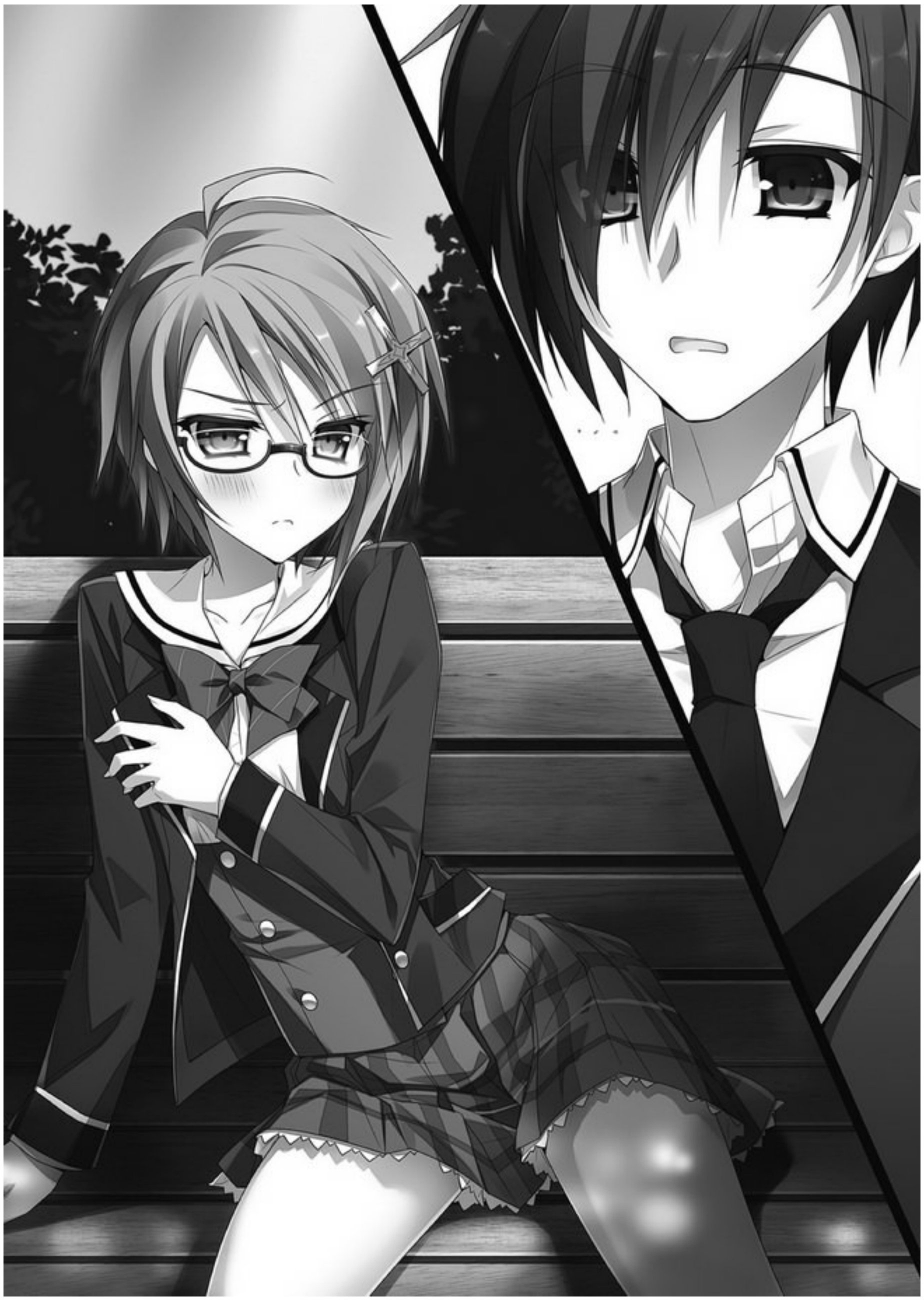
Nevertheless, sunlight, and intense sunlight in particular, still eroded their bodies and sapped their strength. Even though they could endure through willpower for a while, fainting was inevitable after a few hours.

By avoiding intense sunlight and taking sufficient rest as well as appropriate nourishment, there were no serious effects -- but Eruru had to cope with work and study, hence a lack of sleep was her everyday life.

Combined with the exertion of PE class -- her accumulated fatigue finally exploded, causing the earlier result.

"I know your constitution is like a vampire's, and nocturnal... But since you still need to go to school during the day, it's better to secure sufficient sleep. Also, when PE class is outdoors, you should rest instead."

"What you want to say is... Because I am a half-vampire? Oh my, I am truly sorry for being nonhuman."



Eruru retorted with agitation.

Rather than saying anything, Hisui tossed to her a sports drink he had bought earlier at a vending machine.

"It's for you. I originally thought it'd be better to get the type for oral rehydration therapy, but it wasn't available."

"......"

Silently, Eruru caught the bottle and began drinking.

Rehydrated, Eruru turned her hostile gaze towards Hisui.

"...How thorough of your preparations. You predicted I would faint?"

"I bought it while you were unconscious. Rather, I should say I know my own body better? Even an ordinary person would collapse if they didn't rest after exhaustion. Especially with the blazing sun right now, that's even more obvious."

"So what? Are you saying that just because I am a half-vampire, I should not mind what happened?"

"Yes yes. Whether human or half-vampire, anyone who busies themselves without knowing their limits is simply a brat who makes trouble for others."

Behind the light-hearted tone of voice was strict admonishing.

Eruru frowned in response but Hisui continued unfazed.

"But I didn't come up with that. This was what my foster parent the vampire who lived a thousand years in human society said."

"...Clearly just a vampire, I have no wish to be lectured on how to live my life by the lessons she gleaned from human society. After all, she must be someone who hides in the dark, the ancestor of shut-ins and social misfits."

"Actually, she has worked virtually every job with night shifts, ranging from convenience store clerks to hostesses at drinking establishments. At one point, she was even the top courtesan at Ginza."

"......"

Eruru remained silent, presumably picturing the sight.

If reports were true, given her beauty, she must have been quite popular indeed.

As for working at a convenience store, she would be most suited to the prevention of theft and robbery. Even if an armed robber came with a gun, she would have handled the situation with ease.

"What kind of vampire was she...!? Could she really be a 'True Ancestor'!? If that girl who lives with you heard this, she would be rendered speechless with amazement!?"

"Apparently she thought that even as a vampire, one must conform to capitalist society in order to survive. Because her life experiences were rather rich, she tends to lecture quite a bit. Such as whether one should compromise work and knowing one's limits were completely separate issues."

"...Coming from your mouth, such advice completely loses all persuasiveness. If your foster parent hears of this from the afterlife, surely she must be sighing."

"Vampires are reduced to nothing when destroyed... Isn't that what happens? Or perhaps they also have souls, allowing them to go to heaven or hell?"

Hisui's casual expression vanished.

When vampires were destroyed, they turned into inorganic dust, leaving no body behind.

No one knew this better than Hisui.

Unable to stare straight into his eyes, Eruru shifted her gaze.

"Overlooking my own health... Is my negligence. I have... troubled you."

"Don't worry about it."

Hisui answered casually and began to drink the mineral water he bought at the vending machine.

Watching him from the side, Eruru spoke after a period of silence.

"You are not... afraid?"

"Huh?"

"Indeed I needed rehydration. But if it were possible, appropriate replenishment of salt was also necessary."

"......? Well, I guess it counts as a heat stroke for you. What's the matter, you're dissatisfied with the sports drink?"

"Ultimately it is something for human consumption. For a half-vampire, there is a more suitable liquid."

Eruru stared at Hisui's neck.

That delicate pale skin which rivaled a woman's.

That certain liquid, coursing through those subtly visible blood vessels, was what Eruru urgently desired at this moment.

Carrying water and salt, as well as life itself, fresh blood.

"Fortunately, my symptoms are not severe... But were I to lose my sanity and bite you, what would you do?"

"That's right... What would happen once you sucked blood and recovered your sanity? I feel like I can imagine your loss of composure."

"...Are you a fool!? Before saving someone, please consider these obvious risks. You should be quite familiar with the characteristics of half-vampires, right?"

"Just go ahead and bite, it's fine. As long as you don't tear out the flesh or suck me dry to death."

Hisui was completely unconcerned.

Due to his special constitution, making this kind of statement was not problematic. In fact, he never feared Eruru in the first place -- he never feared half-vampires.

"You are incurably stupid. I will not be responsible for the consequences, you know? Do you think you can use your ridiculous philanthropism to build a bridge between two different races?"

"I'm not that kind of saint. To be honest, I wouldn't care if a great villain was being sucked to death by a vampire. Neither would I involve myself if I saw a vampire dying of thirst."

"Liar. If you saw an incurable villain being threatened by the fangs of a vampire, you will still save him. If you saw a famished vampire, you will offer your own neck. That is the kind of person you are."

"...Are you praising me?"

"I am criticizing you. Open your eyes to the truth."

Ending the conversation, Eruru stood up from the bench.

She had recovered her strength and was able to move freely. Now that the sun was setting, the most active time of the day for half-vampires had begun.

"Sorry for troubling you. I am fine now."

"Then it's about time you tell me, why did you stay behind in school? If it's for monitoring me and Rushella, there's no point if we already left. You should have left instead and followed us, right? But today... yesterday as well as the day before, you stayed in school. We all left the classroom together when club activities ended, but at the shoe cabinet at the entrance, you parted with us, why?"

Hisui asked with a serious expression.

Eruru finally surrendered and shrugged.

"Your observation skills are sharp as ever. I do have a mission. Even though I have to monitor you two as well, I expressly transferred here, to this school -- or rather, I should say to this area of Seidou city to conduct investigations."

"What investigations... Is there anything in this city worth mobilizing the Metropolitan Police Department? Well, I guess the earlier incident counts..."

"Before that incident, secret investigations were already underway. The reason why we of the Supernatural Investigations Section were stationed at the police station here, was because of this particular matter."

"......!"

That's right -- Eruru and Hisui's first encounter happened at the closest police station, Seidou Police Station.

Originally he had thought they were sent here due to Rushella's appearance... But it looked like he was wrong.

"What is this about?"

"Crime cases in the neighborhood as well as missing persons have been on the rise recently. However, the increase is only slightly above average norms, this in and of itself is not worthy of note. Nevertheless, as the investigation progressed deeper, we discovered that a portion of the cases were greatly related to supernatural beings. Amongst them, there were clear cases where vampires were culprits -- corpses that had been sucked completely dry."

"You are suspecting... Rushella?"

"This was before her awakening. Even though we cannot believe everything she says, given her straightforward personality she does not seem to be lying. These cases are most likely unrelated to her. But this makes things even trickier, after all, there is a vampire working in the dark which the Supernatural Investigations Section cannot track."

"That's true... But then I've been living in this city ever since Miraluka adopted me, and this is the first time for me to hear something like this. When I was young, I never heard stories of strange happening or supernatural phenomena. Why would you people......?"

As Hisui crossed his arms in thought, Eruru continued.

"That's right... The incident that caught our attention happened only recently. However, you can think of it this way. The foster parent who raised you -- in other words, the existence of the vampire Miraluka, could it have acted as some sort of suppressive power?"

"......!?"

"Consider this carefully, if a 'True Ancestor'-class vampire lived somewhere, then first of all, other vampires will stay away. As long as they are unrelated by sire, they would all keep their distance. This would apply to other supernatural creatures as well -- no one would want to approach the residence of the existence crowned as the king of the night, the highest ranking of the undead race. Even though it is unclear if this was done out of her conscious will, simply by living here, she created a kind of safety zone. Precisely because of that, you received her protection and were naturally unaware of supernatural commotions. What do you think?"

"...What you say makes sense."

In his heart, Hisui basically agreed with Eruru's deductions.

Although he was not too clear on the mindset of supernatural creatures, it was plausible that there would be a lack of troublemakers recklessly approaching a 'True Ancestor'-class vampire. If a supernatural creature were to run over here and do evil, it would definitely be exterminated.

"Also, before you and your foster parent moved here, all sorts of strange rumors already existed in the area."

"Really!? Rumors, you don't say!? Is it those kinds of scary ghost stories that are common amongst folklore!?"

"Completely different from that kind of rumor. Rather than folkloristic strange tales, they are more like urban legends -- and for some unknown reason, they mostly involve western supernatural entities rather than eastern youkai."

"What... I've heard that this place used to interact with foreign countries, with frequent commercial trade, would that be the reason? I don't really know much about local history."

Arms crossed, Hisui recalled his memories of this city from early childhood.

"As expected, you do not know either. Rather, it is very likely that everyone your age have no impression."

"...So something existed in this city before Miraluka arrived. After that, it either left or concealed its tracks... Is that what you mean?"

"Nevertheless, that vampire is no longer. The time of her disappearance -- right, it was after your summer holiday during your third year of middle school."

Hisui instantly paled.

Images surfaced from memories he did not wish to recall.

"I investigated your immigration record. Prior to your summer holiday during the third year of middle school, you really traveled all over the world. Rather than foreign vacations, it would be more appropriate to describe your stays as a series of short term study abroad sessions. However, starting from that particular summer, you never left the country again."

Hisui did not answer.

He already expected his past to be dug up. Naturally, Eruru would not have spared any efforts in this area. This did not really matter.

But she was also digging Hisui's old memories from his mind.

"The last time you returned from overseas, you were under a certain country's embassy's protection, transferring through another country before reaching Japan. This was only natural, seeing as the country you went to had broken out in civil war and fallen into complete chaos. Vampires aside, a human like you must have suffered much hardship."

"……"

"When you returned... You were alone. Records indicate you had also left Japan alone, so it might have been reasonable. However, will a child really head over to that kind of tumultuous country alone? Even if the exit records did not indicate it... Perhaps there was a legal guardian in accompaniment?"

Legal guardian -- that's right, the foster parent who was much older than him.

The one who played the role of mother and elder sister, and closer to him than any other family.

"However -- you returned alone, carrying two objects which you did not have when you left Japan."

"...Stop it."

"The first is a massive cross. Very likely, it is that sword in your basement. The other is --"

"Shut up!!"

The sudden outburst silenced Eruru. Or rather, she swallowed the remainder of her words.

Hisui's emotions surprised her.

"Please stop talking about my past. Do you want to be mistaken for a stalker?"

"...My apologies. I should not have said these unnecessary things. Anyway, something exists in this city. Something that laid low while your vampire foster parent was living here, but is now restless once more."

"After all, we already have a strange vampire as well as a golem of Frankenstein's. But apart from them, what else is out there? Besides, you're investigating within the school?"

Without answering, Eruru walked into the forest behind the bench.

Hisui followed in puzzlement.

Soon enough, Eruru stopped walking and bent down.

"It appeared today as well."

"...What?"

Craning his neck, Hisui looked at what lay before Eruru's eyes.

Then he could not help but frown and avert his gaze.

Calming his heart, he looked at the thing on the ground again.

Lying on the soil -- was the corpse of a black cat.

It looked like it had been rolled over by the tire of a car, with a huge depression on its belly. The sight was most tragic.

Based on its size it should be a kitten, which evoked even more pity.

"You were looking for this...? By the way, how did you know it would be in this kind of place?"

"Because including the one today, this is the third occurrence."

"Huh!?"

"About a week earlier... I was strolling within the school and happened to pass by this area. Smelling the stench of blood, I came over for a look... And found the corpse of a black cat as well. Compared to today's, its appearance was even more pitiful with its entire belly ripped open."

"......"

Eruru spoke indifferently. Very likely she acted in the same manner as today, staring away without reservation.

"Three days after that, I walked here... And found another similar corpse. Although there were no visible external injuries, it was most probably poisoned judging from the strange smell coming from its mouth. After that... It appeared again today."

"What is going on here... Completely mind-boggling... Are you telling me there's a lunatic in the school who cruelly kills kittens and leaves their corpses lying around in the wilderness!? No, wait a minute... since you came to investigate, is the culprit a supernatural creature?"

"Unclear at this moment, but one thing is for certain. This cat is a live sacrifice."

"......!?"

Hearing Eruru's assertion, Hisui looked at the black cat's corpse again.

The kitten's tragic appearance -- on the soil beneath it, strange patterns had been carved.

A circle just large enough to surround the kitten's body, with symbols written within it as well as various shapes with a triangular motif.

Even without expert knowledge, most people would understand the meaning of this circle.

It must be -- a magic circle.

This shape was drawn for the sake of performing magic.

The exquisite detail made it difficult to believe it was merely some sort of prank.

Furthermore, most alarming of all was the way the magic circle was drawn.

The perpetrator did not use some tool like a branch to draw on the soil. Naturally, it was not drawn using chalk like in PE lessons either.

Black with a slight shade of red, along with the smell wafting in the air. Hisui knew what had been used to draw the circle.

It was blood.

Blood which slightly stained the soil red, carving the magic circle in the ground.

"This is completely tasteless... What is it, cat's blood? Or is it..."

"Human blood. Judging from the smell. As much as I hate to admit it, I am actually quite sensitive to anything blood-related, that needs to be clarified. Furthermore, this is..."

Eruru picked up a handful of soil and casually scattered it over the magic circle.

Falling, the soil covered a portion of the circle.

However, -- very quickly, red lines appeared over the obscuring soil.

Clearly when the blood was seeped into the ground, it should have disappeared when covered with fresh soil or if the blood-stained ground was dug up -- but the magic circle did not disappear.

"What is going on here... Not a prank...? Could it really be...!?"

"Looks like... It should be some sort of magic. What is known as black magic. In any case, there is a need to undertake...... Hey, what are you doing?"

Ignoring Eruru's calls, Hisui picked up the dead kitten.

"Please do not touch it recklessly! What are you thinking!?"

"The same as you."

Hisui pointed to the depths of the forest.

"After all, you're going to bury it for sure, like the previous two. If there were flowers, I'd like to offer them as well."

"Umm......"

Eruru blushed and turned her face away.

Hisui smiled and dug up a grave just as she had done before.

At this very moment, the kitten opened its eyes.

Its golden pupils glowed brilliantly.

Narrowing its eyes into a straight line, the cat's gaze pierced Hisui.

"Wha...!?"

"Those who recklessly involve themselves in the way of magic, shall surely be cursed..."

"You......"

The kitten definitely spoke.

When it was clearly dead.

It should not have been able to make any sound at all.

Nevertheless -- it spoke with a hoarse human voice.

Using that tone of voice, a mixture of hate and anger, it continued to speak.

"Shall surely be cursed...... Shall surely be cursed......!!"

This time, the kitten not only talked but also extended its front claws, making a scratch on Hisui's his right wrist.

"Hmm......"

Hisui could not help but let go, dropping the kitten onto the ground.

At the same time, it closed its eyes.

Then it lay there motionless. The kitten returned to the silent state of death.

"......The previous two, did they talk as well?"

Trembling, Hisui asked Eruru but she shook her head with a grave expression.

"...No. Nothing similar happened previously."

The two fell silent for a moment. Hisui rubbed the wound from the scratch.

It seemed to be fine.

The scratch extended from the wrist all the way to the forearm. Due to his constitution, the bleeding stopped very quickly.

"...Will I be cursed?"

"Who knows..."

Eruru was unsure.

The awkward atmosphere made one at a loss for words. Hisui carefully reached out to pick up the kitten once more.

It seemed like it was not going to move again.

"Are you still doing it... Already cursed?"

"Don't say unlucky things. Well... Looking at things from its perspective, it must really hate us. Humans are all the same in its eyes. Next, I can handle this alone..."

"No, I shall help as well."

After that, Hisui and Eruru made a simple grave for the kitten and returned home.

As they parted, Eruru said to him:

"Please keep today's incident a secret from that girl who lives with you. I have no wish to be hassled by her questioning."

"Got it."

"Sooner or later, Sudou-san will join in to assist... But you should not act alone for now. If anything comes up, report to me immediately. Understood?"

"......I understand."

Then they went off their separate ways.

Along the way home, Hisui suddenly recalled the words of his foster parent.

When he was first adopted by Miraluka, just as they started living in this house, he had asked her -- why live here?

Because he felt that vampires seemed more suited to live in ancient castles deep in the mountains.

After hearing his question, Miraluka thought for a moment before answer in the following manner:

--Well, the reasons are hard to describe... But first of all, it's because this is more interesting.

"Interesting?"

--Yes, a strange fellow lives here.

"What kind?"

--In this very city...

Reaching here, she smiled lightly with profound meaning. Parting her lips to reveal her pristine white fangs which flashed with cold luster, Miraluka leaned over and whispered softly in Hisui's ear.

--A witch lives. Even now, her blood continues to pulsate.

Chapter 2 - Witch's Recipe

"Too slow! What on earth were you doing!?"

...Even though he expected this, as soon as Hisui stepped into his home, he was faced with Rushella's lecturing.

Standing at the entrance with her arms crossed, she resembled a stern door god. No answer, no entry -- this was the kind of aura exuded by Rushella.

"Hmm... Just something minor to do."

"Why didn't you chase after me!? Goodness knows how many times I halted or looked back, but I couldn't even catch a glimpse of your shadow!"

"...What. Aren't you the one who ran away? And you end up wanting me to chase after you?"

Hisui's question made Rushella's face turn scarlet.

"S-Shut up, you are obliged to stay by my side at all times! This is obvious!!"

"...So annoying."

Hisui muttered as he took off his shoes and entered the house.

Putting down his bag, he was planning to return to his room directly when Rushella grabbed him by the wrist.

"...What?"

"What happened to your wrist?"

Hisui's right wrist was wrapped in black medical bandages. It would be troublesome if others saw the scratch from the black cat, so he bought them along the way home to cover things up.

He originally intended to use a more fashionable sports-use wrist guard, but the wound was too long to be covered by ordinary wrist guards.

Rushella discovered it as a result.

"Just a minor sprain, nothing much."

"On your body... There's the smell of blood."

Rushella asked solemnly.

Hisui knew very well he could not hide things of this nature from her.

Regarding any issue related to blood, vampires were experts after all.

"A human killed a kitten, so I gave it some last rites in a human manner."

"What is that!? I forbid you to hide anything from me!"

"I'm not hiding anything. This is definitely not human blood, you should be able to tell, right?"

"...Indeed. But there's also the smell of your blood."

"Just a minor scratch when I sprained my right arm. Nothing much."

The dead cat and the magic circle, as well as that instant of revival and the cursed incantation -- simply explaining everything would be troublesome enough. Informing Rushella would be equivalent to bidding farewell to peace and quiet. In the worst case, she might even drag him back to school.

"...Well whatever. I have something else to ask you."

"What?"

"You also have a woman's smell on you... Different from that fake... It's that woman named Eruru."

Rushella drew her face near Hisui's chest, looked up into his eyes and questioned.

"...What is with your special sense of smell? I'm quite familiar with vampires thanks to circumstances beyond my control, but this is the first time I'm hearing about this kind of ability?"

"I know what I know. So you were with that woman?"

"......Yes."

It was not like he had done anything improper.

Besides, he had no obligation to report to this arrogant vampire everyone he had been with.

Nevertheless, for some unknown reason -- Hisui could not bring himself to gaze directly into her crimson eyes that were focused on him.

"Last time, the two of you also went to the hospital together, right!?"

"Only for a simple check up. On the other hand, since you're the one sucking my blood every day, couldn't you show a little more concern for my health instead?"

"What's so good about that kind of woman? So short and diminutive, almost like a little child!"

"...Ever since I met you and Sudou, I've come to realize that a woman's figure only occupies an extremely minor fraction of their charm."

Hisui exclaimed with heartfelt feeling.

This was his personal experience.

"What do you mean by that!? You think I wouldn't realize that woman's true identity!?"

Eruru's true nature -- a half-vampire, was something Hisui had not told Rushella yet.

There was no obligation to reveal it. That counts as one of the reasons. But more importantly, Eruru hated her origins so much, it was not proper to casually disclose her secret.

According to Eruru, the only ones aware of this fact were the top echelons of the Supernatural Investigations Section. Apparently, even Mei was not privy to the fact. However, it was possible that her sharp instincts may have already picked up on it.

As for Rushella... She sounded like she already knew.

Vampires were born with fiery eyes and golden pupils which allowed them to discern humans from nonhuman existences. She must have felt something towards Eruru who inherited half of her blood from the same race.

"If that Sudou woman is called a fake, then this woman should be called..."

"Don't say it. I forbid it. If you say it out, I will hate you for it."

Hisui simply stated indifferently in his characteristic tone.

But the relentless will inherent in his words caused Rushella to stop talking.

She knew that Hisui was one who becomes almost like a different person in critical situations, and should not be underestimated.

"Hmph, there is no issue of liking or hating in our relationship in the first place! Between a master and a servant, those kinds of feelings are unnecessary!"

"Ah, is that so? Well, I guess it's true that there's no lack of servants who dislike their masters."

"...I'm hungry. Prepare dinner."

"Yes yes."

Hisui did not disobey the displeased Rushella and immediately headed to the kitchen.

With virtually no conversation on the dinner table, Hisui did the dishes afterwards while Rushella went to take a bath.

Rushella liked to enjoy her baths nice and slow. While waiting for her to finish, Hisui went out to retrieve the hung laundry that had dried, and began to iron them out.

Halfway through his chores, Hisui undid his bandages to examine the cat scratch.

What was originally a shallow cut was now a subtle pink line. However, due to his pale complexion it was rather conspicuous.

Normally, this level of injury should disappear after a while, but for Hisui, this was already quite an unusual situation.

This sort of minor wound should have healed immediately.

It was Hisui's constitution.

Even cursed kisses that should not disappear until the vampire is destroyed, Hisui's body could heal them instantly. But for some unknown reason, the wound before him was healing rather slowly.

"...Was I really cursed?"

Staring upwards, Hisui sighed, slightly unsettled, and continued ironing.

Holding up an outspread shirt he finished ironing, he nodded with satisfaction. At this moment, someone snatched the shirt away from beside him.

"Yes, well done!"

There was no need to turn to look. Judging from the voice and the sense of heat, he knew it was Rushella.

For her, the shirts Hisui wore beneath his school jacket were her everyday home attire. As soon as he finished ironing, it would be snatched from his hands every time like this.

"Say, why do you have to wear my shirt every time!? At least pick something old with washed out colors, okay!? Why do you have to keep snatching the ones I just ironed!?"

"Ironed clothes feel comfortable! To wear something creased, how unbecoming that would be!?"

"Why do you have to be stubborn in such an area!?"

Hisui turned to her and instantly realized his mistake.

Because Rushella happened to be adjusting her indoor casual wear.

In other words, up until this point, she had been clad in nothing but a bath towel.

Then casting that towel aside, she was in the wonderful moment of getting dressed.

Her voluptuous breasts and the secret region below her narrow waist were bursting out of her yet to be buttoned shirt.

"Looking is forbidden -- !!"

Unreasonable punches pelted Hisui's face like rain, beating him into the ground.

"What are you doing!? It's your own fault, suddenly changing on the spot!"

Hisui raised his objections. He originally intended to stand up and uphold justice -- but could not get up.

Rushella held him to the floor and drew her face near.

Her humongous bosom, squeezed out of shape against Hisui's chest, seemed to be desperately calling for attention to its size and suppleness. Combined with the soapy fragrance of a beauty fresh out of the bath, as well as the scent emanating from her moist hair, Hisui's thoughts were sent into complete disarray.

"Why are you lying on top of me?"

Pushing away Rushella's glamorous body was not particularly difficult.

Even though he was sure to suffer a full-powered counterattack from the vampire after sunset, but apart from that... For some reason he did not understand, Hisui could not resist.

"...If I move my body away, you're going to stare nonstop. You think I wouldn't notice you gazing at me coming out of the bath?"

"You've been wearing nothing but a towel out of the bath, and as for clothes all you have is my shirt draped on you. I'm worried you might catch a cold, that's all. You should hurry up and thank me for my care and concern, even vaster than the ocean."

"Who knows if it's true or not?"

Rushella avoided Hisui's gaze but pressed her body even tighter.

In order to prevent Hisui from escaping, she entangled her lithe and beautiful legs around Hisui's legs.

"Umm...... Isn't it about time to release me?"

"The club... You can't save it?"

"Huh?"

Faced with Rushella's sudden pleading demeanor, Hisui was taken aback for an instant.

Rushella turned her head sideways as she lay on Hisui's chest, avoiding his gaze.

Pouting, she continued.

"Just as that arrogant woman said, all sorts of things needed to be done properly... If we do all of that, then the club can continue?"

"......"

"Why couldn't she turn a blind eye and overlook our case? I hate that woman."

Mumbling repeatedly to herself, Rushella began to trace circles on Hisui's chest with her finger.

Anxiety can be felt from the motions of her fingertips, as her nail lightly scratched him from time to time.

"Why are you so obsessed? Do you want to find out your past that much? I will surely help you, you know? Even though there is strength in numbers, but Sudou has her own affairs, and Kariya... Has to prioritize matters of the Supernatural Investigations Section. Based on the truth of your past... She could end up as your enemy."

"......"

Rushella probably understood deep in her heart.

Eruru had tried to kill her at one point. Even though cleared of suspicions for now, as soon as Rushella sucks the blood of a human apart from Hisui, that core member of the Supernatural Investigations Section would surely aim that gun chambered with silver bullets at her without hesitation.

Looking into Rushella's past was ultimately just a part of her investigation -- only for the purpose of establishing a proper policy towards the threat of the 'True Ancestor'-class vampire, Rushella Dahm Draculea.

"...I don't really care about that. Yes, I do want to retrieve my memories but being impatient won't help. Besides, I never wanted to rely on those people in the first place."

"Then why do you want a club?"

"I haven't decided yet... But I want to do it."

"Do what?"

Rushella fell silent.

Then she buried her face in Hisui's chest.

"Excuse me... Rushella-san?"

"People who join clubs... All look very happy."

"...? Of course, people join clubs because of their interest. Even though sports clubs' practice schedules could be quite harsh... However... that still counted as satisfaction amidst hardship?"

"In other words... They are engaging in 'youth,' right?"

"Huh--!?"

The term uttered by Rushella made Hisui's eyes stare wide in surprise. That term was clearly the furthest thing one would associate with vampires.

"What is with that look, you object!?"

"No no no... I just never expected you to say something like that so openly. What happened, were you influenced by school dramas on television?"

"You're annoying, shut up! I didn't say anything wrong! For people of your age, 'youth' is indispensable!!"

"Yeah, well, so to speak..."

Based on the dictionary definition, it was basically correct. As for whether it applied in actual fact, that was open to question.

"What does it matter anyway... Even someone like me, umm... Would like to enjoy this whatever 'youth' with relish!"

"Say, I'm not even sure how old you are now? No matter how you look, it would not be surprising if you turned out to be over a century old. For you, youth probably flew away like a bird a long time ago, never to return......"

Hisui was trying to show off some poetic imagery, but he discovered Rushella glaring at him as soon as he finished.

"Ah... By the way, you still haven't... experienced youth, right?"

More accurately, she did not have memories of experiencing youth.

Perhaps she was indeed a century old, or even more ancient than that.

For Rushella who had no memories, the present was everything she had.

What she possessed, was the month long period she experienced after encountering Hisui, as well as the mental age which matched her teenage appearance.

Because of that, seeing others in her age group enthusiastically participating in club activities affected her especially.

That past she had once savored -- as if trying to retrieve lost memories, she desired to create her own memories of youth.

Hisui basically understood her intentions, and began scratching his head impatiently.

"Fine fine, I got it. I will try my best, okay?"

"Really!? Yes, how obedient!"

Rushella's eyes instantly glistened with delight.

While she was still in a good mood, Hisui decided to bring up the question he had harbored ever since he entered this position... Or rather, ever since he started living together with her.

"Say......"

"What is it?"

"Up to now, I haven't asked you this question. Actually I don't think it's currently very possible either, but......"

"What on earth are you trying to say!? If you have a question, be out with it, stop stuttering!"

"...Have you been wearing underwear properly?"

Rushella's expression froze.

Hisui tried his best to avoid looking in her face as he recalled everything that had happened so far.

Since the shirts she wore as indoor casual wear were white, it was naturally quite easy to see through them.

Nevertheless, no matter how hard he stared, he could never catch a glimpse of that elusive yet mesmerizing fabric.

The only images reflected into his eyes were the voluptuous curves of her glamorous body.

From the day he started living with her, Hisui had been consumed with doubt in his heart, could it be possible...

More importantly, when she put on the shirt just now, she had exited the bath clad in nothing but a towel.

Based on common sense... Whether on top or below, she should be wearing nothing.

"...Why are you not refuting me? Could you actually be..."

"S-Shut up, what does it matter! Aren't you half naked too after you take a bath? Besides, you can't see anything while I'm wearing a shirt...... Fine, it's all your fault for looking at me that way, you are in the wrong!!"

Rushella argued with her face all red.

Finding her reaction to be exactly as expected, Hisui rolled his eyes and looked up at the ceiling.

"Say, I've heard that women usually don't wear a bra to sleep, so that's no big deal to me... As long as you wear it when you're at school or going out."

Rushella shuddered after hearing his words and stiffly turned her face to avoid Hisui's gaze.

"Come on... it can't be!?"

Without answering, she simply counted on her fingers and then looked towards Hisui once more.

"...It's okay!"

"What do you mean, it's okay!! It happened...? How many times!? How many times did you go to school without wearing underwear!?"

"Let bygones be bygones......"

Uncharacteristically, Rushella did not retort loudly but instead, she stared ahead silently.

"......I'm trying to assist you in school life, but this is one area I can't help out... Please, you have to pay attention yourself."

"So annoying, shut up!!"

Rushella screamed and raised her fist above her head and sat up from Hisui's body, about to beat him up as usual.

But this act became the start of tragedy.

For Hisui, that is.

Rushella's shirt -- was still unbuttoned.

If she had maintained the previous posture where she was tightly pressed against him, it was still possible to conceal the vital areas.

But now... It was just a shirt draped over her shoulders.

Rushella's voluptuous bosom was unsealed before Hisui's eyes, jumping out in full view.

Droplets of bathwater left on her body, flowed across her pristine white skin, streaming along the flower buds of her breasts, descended upon Hisui's forehead.

"U-Ummm......"

"I-Insolent knave -- !!"

Rushella pounded mercilessly with both fists.

Patches of red began to blossom across Hisui's face.

"W-Wait a minute...... Put on your clothes first! Button it up! They're shaking... While you're beating on me, they're shaking nonstop!!"

"So annoying, shut up! Looking is forbidden--!!"

"I'm talking about your......!!"

As the sounds of Hisui's screams and moans echoed across the living room, Rushella ignored his protests.

After that, needless to say, she drank her fill of Hisui's blood to rehydrate herself after a bath.

"......Based on the above, my life is currently in peril, can't you think of a way to help?"

With a mournful expression, Hisui was pleading with Kirika as she happened to be watering the flowerbeds. He truly looked pitiful.

"What are you talking about suddenly? Did something happen?"

"...Nothing."

Early in the morning, Hisui had gone to visit Kirika. Fatigue and weariness written all over his face, his androgynous visage was also covered with wounds from the beating.

Rushella was really angry yesterday, plus the fact that night was prime for vampire activity, his calamity lasted for quite a while.

Thanks to Hisui's superhuman recovery, most of the internal bleeding healed quickly, but the pain from the bruises still lingered in his body, unable to dissipate.

If he had to let his blood be sucked in the morning in accordance with his everyday mission, it would definitely be too much to bear. Hence, Hisui got up before Rushella woke up -- leaving breakfast and a note behind, he left the house alone.

"Senpai sure comes early. Is the entire student council like this?"

"Of course not, just me, that is all. Even if the others arrive early, it would be due to club activities, probably. Coming to school early because of morning practice, they treat the student council office as their storage area, and disappear... Basically like that?"

Kirika continued to water the flowerbeds without pause as she spoke.

Finishing one patch, she moved onto the next. Whenever she found clear signs of weeds, she also pulled them out seriously.

Although Hisui did not know much about gardening, he could tell from the actions of this vice president that she was not only knowledgeable about plants, she also loved them very much. Unconcerned that her pale white hands were soiled with dirt, Kirika performed gardening work with complete dedication.

"Could it be that, watering all the flowerbeds in school... Is done by Senpai alone?"

"Yes. It is a good thing for the school to have flowers growing all over the place, but the janitors are too busy. Since there is no extra budget to hire more personnel, taking care of the plants has been assigned to the student council."

"...Well, why is it only Senpai alone? Won't it be quite tiring?"

"Because no one else wants to do it."

Kirika exclaimed sulkily as she continued to immerse herself in work.

Watching her like this, Hisui recalled the rumor his neighbor in class, Sera Reina, had told him.

Uno Kirika, who acted even more proper than the proper president -- was being ostracized by the other student council members. They were on quite poor relations.

While Kirika immersed herself in the student council's work with great fervor, the rest of the council members simply fulfilled their duties with minimum effort, resulting in a massive festering conflict.

"It must be tough for you."

"This is all of my own choosing. Besides, I only reached this position through everyone's votes, right? If I really did not want to do it, I would have quit from the start. Besides--"

"Besides?"

"...None of your business."

Although Kirika coldly refused to answer, Hisui could guess roughly what her unvoiced reason was.

This was also a rumor he heard from Reina.

This responsible and talented girl who strictly adhered to school rules and discipline -- she acted this way for a very simple reason.

Because she loved the school.

Hence she performed the student council's duties more seriously than anyone.

But consequently, she was a formidable foe.

"...So? Do you have any other business?"

"Haha, well... About the club, can you show a little leniency......"

"Rather than talking to me, you should find a teacher instead? After all, a club adviser is essential."

"......You're right."

"What kind of club are you running anyway?"

"......The Occult Research Club, I guess?"

This was the result after a night's worth of agonizing contemplation.

After all, given this group of nonhumans, they basically belonged to the occult.

Vampire, artificial human and half-vampire, plus himself with the unusual constitution which prevented him from turning into a vampire.

"What on earth? Do you really think the school will approve of something so unscientific?"

"...That's true~"

He was just chatting casually, but ended up with a flat rejection. Still, he had expected this result.

"Ah... But I think one existed before. Just an unofficial hobby group."

"...Really?"

Hisui's eyes flashed as he was struck with sudden inspiration.

Yesterday he had heard from Eruru about roaming supernatural creatures, and had witnessed the curse ritual.

It was a bit of a stretch, but he felt like there was some sort of connection between them.

"However, I don't really know about the details. Urban legends... Or should I say, more like strange rumors in school. Probably counts as one of our schools Seven Wonders. Solving the mystery of the 'Witch,' the Occult Research Club... Something like that maybe?"

"Witch!?"

Hearing her repeat the term, Hisui unwittingly moved closer to Kirika.

Instantly, their faces almost touching, they could feel each other's breath.

Then an expression of fear flashed momentarily across Kirika's face as she swiftly pushed Hisui away.

"...Don't come close so suddenly!"

"Ah... Sorry."

Seeing her frightened, Hisui silently stepped back. The upperclassman who usually seemed so powerful and intimidating to others, was currently speaking with such docility... So uncharacteristically girlish.

At this time, another rumor he heard from Reina surfaced in his memory.

She hated boys very much, especially weak ones.

"That Occult Research Club... Is just a rumor after all. A rumor dating to before the school was rebuilt."

"......?"

"You didn't know? Our high school, just before I enrolled, had just undergone large scale remodeling and reconstruction. As a result, the current layout of the buildings is very different from before. Thanks to that, what Seven Wonders, what Occult Research Club, these kinds of inane rumors have basically all been wiped out."

"I see... So that's why I never heard of them."

"If you are interested, try asking your homeroom teacher Horie-sensei?

She is probably the most senior person in this community."

"Really......"

It looked like the child-faced diminutive homeroom teacher had a little-known side to her.

"Anything more you have to say? I still have further tasks to busy myself with. I would like to finish watering before the morning assembly."

Saying that, Kirika busied herself with the weeding.

Then Hisui joined in.

"...What are you doing? Please do not get so close to me so casually, okay?"

"I'll help you. This will dirty your hands? Look, it's dirty already."

"......"

"You haven't finished watering, right? Why don't you do the other places first?"

Without waiting for Kirika to respond, Hisui knelt down and got to work.

"Even if you do this... Do not be deluded into thinking of currying my favor, okay? There is nothing more to discuss regarding your club."

"I never expected that from the start."

Hisui replied unfazed, focusing on the task at hand.

Kirika stared at him for a while, then pointed to the bandages on his wrist and asked:

"...What happened to you there?"

"A minor injury, nothing much."

"...Beware of infection. You have to wash your hands properly all the time."

"You really sound like a school nurse."

Hisui smiled as he spoke. Hearing that, Kirika blushed.

Just as Hisui was planning to continue working, he heard disastrous footsteps.

"I finally found you! How dare you escape your morning duties, running off to leave me alone!!"

"Crap......"

Turning around, he found Rushella holding a parasol, standing behind him.

Rushing over in a huff, she grabbed Hisui from behind, lifting him by his underarms.

"Yesterday you left me, and again today, why!?"

"It's a long story..."

"So annoying, shut up!"

Rushella ignored Hisui's efforts to explain and directly drew her lips towards his neck.

His morning duties... In other words, blood sucking time, was taking place at school.

"Hey, hold it, consider the situation first!"

Naturally, Rushella could not be stopped, hence her bright red lips pressed upon Hisui's neck.

Then she bared her fangs and prepared to bite. Hisui frantically screamed.

"I said stop!! Senpai is watching!!"

"Mmmm... What are you looking at!?"

"The villain is slinging accusations first!?"

Hisui guiltily looked towards Kirika... As expected, she was gazing at him with derision.

"Morning duties eh? So you do this every single day?"

"Yes! Even though this guy always screams and yells, resisting in the beginning, he always yields obediently in the end!"

"Stop using such an easily misunderstood description... In the end, you always hold me down by force, right!?"

"In that case, why don't you lock the door? In fact, you're looking forward to my arrival, right!?"

"Because if I lock the door, it's the door that will meet a sad fate... There's no escape."

Hisui grumbled in a voice too soft for Rushella to hear, then he looked at Kirika again with trepidation.

The distaste on her face needed no explanation, and her gaze was like she was looking at something dirty.

"...You two are truly infatuated with each other. So, in wanting to create a club, are you saying you want to do this kind of thing in school as well?"

"Yes, that is correct, I always feel the urge to suck from time to time. With the club classroom, I won't need to be concerned with so many things..."

"Idiot......!!!"

Rushella's statement was revealing her secret identity.

Hisui frantically covered her mouth with his hands, but Kirika had already stopped looking in their direction.

"I am sorry, you entitled to neither budget nor classroom. If you want to make out, please do it outside the school."

Then she left without looking back.

Hisui sighed as he scratched his head.

"You really... Came and killed all hope. Looks like the matter is sealed... I feel like even if we applied it will be rejected directly."

"Stop worrying."

"I'm saying, this is all your fault... Hey, why are you starting to suck! Hey, it hurts, stop it......!!"

Hisui's screams reverberated until finally, Rushella having had her fill, threw him to the ground.

Unable to move at first, he had to wait a while before returning to the classroom, pressing a hand against his neck. Little did he know, there was a figure watching his every move from the shadows.

"Okay~ students, everyone please pay attention. Try not to get hurt while you're working~"

Homeroom teacher Horie Jyuri was directing the students to work with her leisurely cute voice.

Hisui's class had home economics during periods three and four and they were having a cooking practical.

Jyuri herself was a world history teacher. If one were to ask why she was standing at the lectern, bandanna around her head, dressed in an apron, it was because the home economics teacher had suddenly fallen ill and was home in bed.

In the fully equipped home economics classroom, the students formed themselves into groups of four or five, working on the assigned cooking tasks.

Even though it was considered class time, it always felt as if there was plenty of opportunity for slacking off.

Whenever they had this lesson, the students happily chatted away as they worked on their cooking.

Hisui's class was naturally no exception. However, since the fruits of their labors today will serve as their lunch, everyone was putting in a bit more serious effort in the cooking.

...All except one.

"Yes, everyone is showing enthusiasm, very good!"

"...Hey you, hurry over and help!"

Hearing Rushella standing on the side, sternly acting as a commanding officer, Mei could not help but retort at her.

Knowing that such words were futile, Hisui simply focused on peeling the potatoes without saying a word. The representative of the class' collective conscience, class rep Sera Reina was at a loss what to do, her gaze moving back and forth between the two, very much in a quandary.

"Besides, you're not even in our group, okay!? The groups are mixed in gender and based on student numbers. Why are you even here!?"

"Someone happily agreed to switch with me. Is there any problem?"

"Yes, clearly you used your 'mystic eyes,' right?"

Hisui looked over at a boy whose eyes were still glazed over.

That student was originally in the same group as Hisui but ended up getting caught by Rushella and then swapped to another group directly.

"Seriously, is this okay, letting her do as she pleases?"

Mei moved close to Hisui and spoke soft enough to be unheard by others.

"...Of course not, but letting that girl go with other groups would be even more terrifying. Since Kariya is not in our group, if a situation arises, only you and I can help defuse it. Don't let the class rep find out, I'm relying on you."

"No problem. In that case, this is our shared task, eh?"

"Somehow it feels like I fell into some sort of trap. Oh well whatever. Could you help me cut the vegetables?"

"Sure~"

Hisui finished peeling and the two entered the vegetable cutting stage.

To Hisui who took charge of the kitchen at home, this kind of work was simply a piece of cake. And from the way Mei handled the kitchen knife to slice the vegetables, she was clearly skilled as well.

"Eh... How unexpected."

"Oh my, who do you think I am? As the latest model of artificial human and blowup doll, in order to satisfy male desires, whether secret formulae for awakening your lower half or the naked apron, all are standard issue equipment."

"Uh sorry, I sincerely hope those functions of yours remain sealed forever."

"Hey you two over there, sticking together is forbidden. No idle talk, get to work!"

Rushella squeezed her way in between them.

"Hey, watch it... I'm holding a knife here......"

Even though Hisui was forewarned, he still reacted a moment too slow.

Pushed by Rushella, his index finger was cut by the kitchen knife.

"Ouch......"

"Are you okay, Hi-kun? Hey, you there, pay attention to the situation!"

Reprimanded by Mei, Rushella retreated with an apologetic expression.

"Kujou-kun, are you fine? Should I go tell the teacher and get a band-aid for you?"

Class rep Reina who was in the middle of preparing the stewing pot, hurried over, greatly worried.

Though Hisui's finger was cut, given his constitution, it was no big deal.

"Ah... It's really okay. In a while, it'll automatically..."

Owwww.

Before he could finish, Hisui felt his fingertip enveloped by moist, soft lips.

As beads of blood escaped his finger, Rushella slowly sucked them into her mouth. While she supported his wrist with her slender hands, it was not even a light bite but gentle sucking.

"Hey......"

Don't suck blood in this kind of place -- was what he wanted to say, but in the end, he let her suck away freely.

Rushella did not embed her fangs as usual, but simply caressed his finger gently with her lips and the inside of her mouth.

Extending her tongue to seek out his wound, she caressed with great lightness of touch.

Then she drew the blood out -- or rather, she was sucking blood at this time only for soothing the pain of the wound.

Even though given Hisui's constitution, this sort of wound would start healing immediately.

As for the pain during the instant of injury and before recovery, he was no different from an ordinary person.

Rushella was sucking away minute amounts of pain and blood between the tip of her tongue and lips.

As if mesmerized by the faint crimson glow from her eyes, everyone in the surroundings stood motionless.

Enshrouded by the quiet atmosphere, only the sound of tongues and lips, licking Hisui's finger with tender affection resounded within the room.

Very soon, the brief but precious tryst came to an end. With a gentle lick, Rushella took her lips away from Hisui's finger.

The wound having vanished, Rushella supplemented with a light kiss on the newly baptized finger.

"It's fine now. I have helped you stop the bleeding. You should feel honored. Also, you're not allowed to bleed recklessly. Your entire body's blood, every single drop belongs to me!"

"T-Thank you......"

Clearly it was all Rushella's fault, but somehow he ended up thanking her, and with his heart racing too.

But in the next instant, he recovered his senses and frantically surveyed the surroundings... The rest of the class turned away in embarrassment one after another.

A few boys were for some reason bent over forwards.

And girls were hiding their blushing cheeks.

Even Eruru... was no exception.

Mei also displayed a face of lament.

"......What a move. Looks like she beats me slightly in tongue skills."

She even murmured that.

And then, Reina, the one who represented the class' collective conscience -- murmured unintelligibly, her face blushing intensely.

"T-That...... It's that thing, right? That... Overseas, very common right, this kind of thing?"

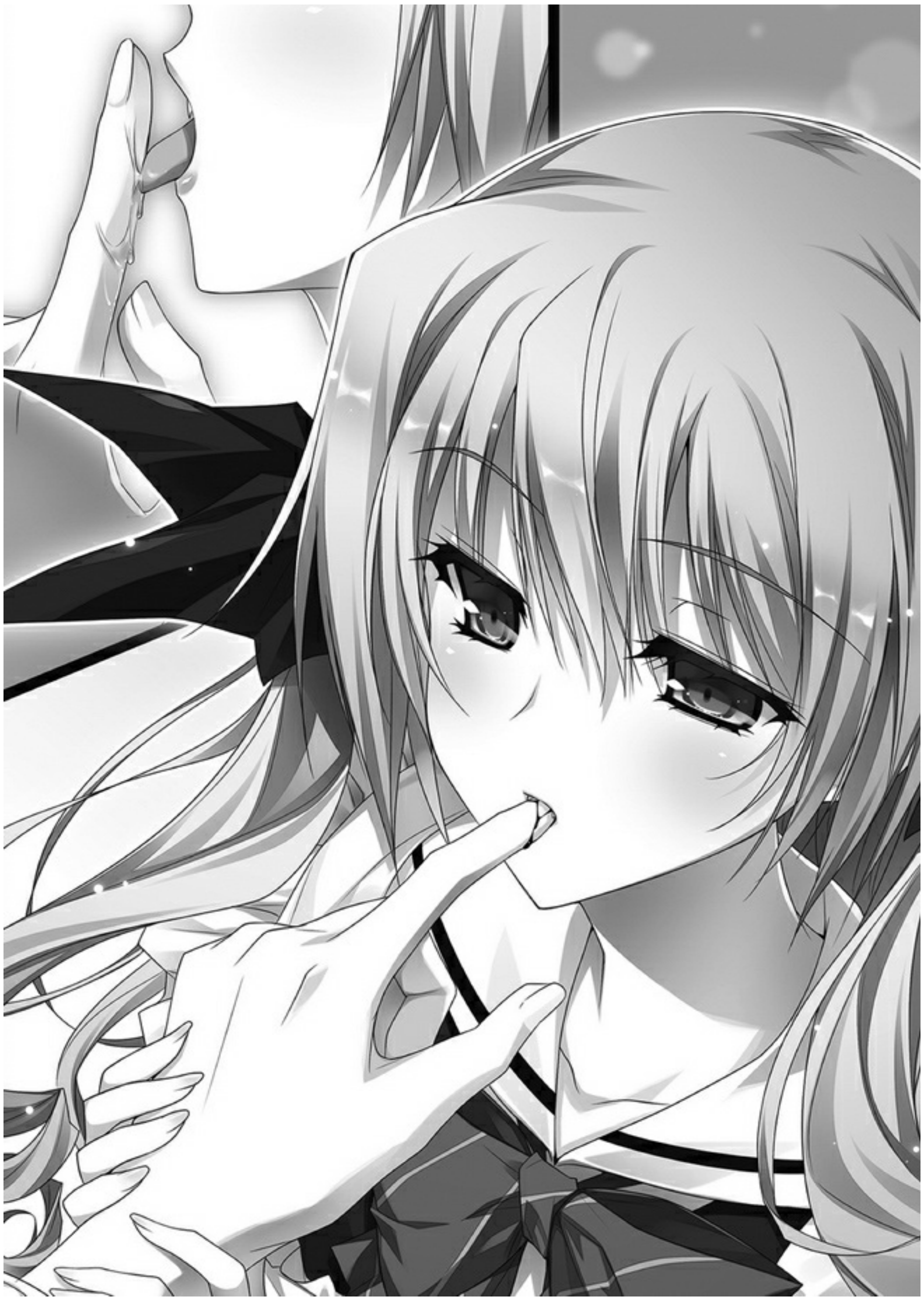
"......I guess."

Hisui was suddenly reminded, in a flash of inspiration, he had introduced Rushella as his distant relative who had returned from overseas.

"That was, simply, wound treatment... That's right. This kind of thing, very common...... Everyone."

Though he knew in his heart this was surely uncommon.

Hisui could only nod and agree.



"Oh, you people know how to do this too? I do it every morning with this guy, so other people have this kind of habit too?"

The atmosphere in the classroom instantly froze.

Especially Reina who entered a rigid mode, her thoughts completely halted.

"Always behaving obediently after sucking, but he's always struggling before the deed. Honestly, it troubles me greatly. Do you guys have any good solutions?"

"W-Who knows......? I haven't, umm, completely this kind of thing..."

Reina shifted her gaze away from Rushella's innocently pure eyes and ran over to boil the water, adding in the soup base, the vegetables and the sausage.

Today's theme was thick soup -- long stewing times was a major characteristic.

"What, you don't know? But whenever the teacher asks you a question in class, you always answer fluently. Don't be stingy, hurry and tell me."

"B-But, this......"

"What's the matter, are you shy?"

Reina was carefully pouring in the soda water when Rushella went over to hassle her.

Seeing her pitiful pleading gaze, the rest of the students silently stared daggers into Hisui.

"...What a disaster."

"...Yeah."

Mei rested a hand on Hisui's shoulder as he hung in head, losing all strength.

It felt like he had lost something precious on this day.

Luckily the finished soup turned out quite nicely, so there was fortune amidst misfortune.

"Wow, well done! This is quite delicious."

"Hurry and thank the class rep who was in charge of the stewing. Definitely this is wonderful. I really want to find out the detailed recipe."

Hearing Hisui's praise, Reina modestly waved her hands.

"It's nothing special really. I simply added a bit of seasoning to the ready-made soup base sold at the market. It's because the vegetables and the meat were sliced well, right?"

As Reina conversed, she diligently handed everyone a paper cup and poured water from a kettle.

Students were allowed to bring their own drinks but the school had also prepared hot water and kettles beforehand.

"Ah, but really this is great. Did you add some secret seasoning recipe?"

"Well......"

Reina was just about to answer when the sound of a dish crashing to the ground was heard.

"What happened?"

Rushella's dish had fallen. The soup was already finished and luckily the dish did not break, so the floor did not require cleaning.

"No... Thing much. Just my hand slipped."

Rushella patted her face, drank some water and picked up the dish to put back on the table.

Then... She stood up unsteadily.

"I'm full. Already, it's lunch break eh... I need to get a bit, of air......"

Staggering, Rushella left the home economics classroom as she finished speaking.

Hisui and Mei exchanged glances and nodded.

Something was not right.

"I'm sorry, the dishes and the clean up... Can I leave it to you?"

"No problem. But I'm expecting a reward afterwards."

"Got it."

Saying that, Hisui finished the remainder of the thick soup in two mouthfuls and drank the water in his paper cup.

"I've finished. Class rep, we'll talk about the recipe next time."

"Yes, very well......"

Ignoring the hesitating class rep, Hisui hurried out of the classroom to look for Rushella.

It did not take much running along the corridor to find her.

Not far from the home economics classroom, Rushella was just up ahead.

She was leaning against the corridor wall, panting heavily.

"Hey, what is happening!?"

"Hisui, is that you......"

Rushella spoke his name weakly then collapsed in Hisui's chest.

"Hey.......!"

She did not respond. Her pale white skin was drenched with sweat, Rushella had completely lost consciousness.

"What happened?"

Hisui looked back to find Eruru. She probably noticed Rushella's unusual signs and followed.

"She fainted... Not moving at all. What on earth is happening......? Will she wake up if I feed her my blood......?"

"Even though blood is the ultimate medicine and nourishment for vampires, save it as the final resort. Let us take her to the infirmary to sleep on a bed first. As for the reason... Saying lack of sleep and anemia should be fine."

"Right."

With Eruru's assistance, Hisui carried Rushella to the infirmary, thereby taking care of the first challenge.

"...Do vampires get sick?"

"Who knows... If even you don't know, neither would I."

Coldly urged by Eruru, Hisui left the infirmary.

It was a strange sort of feeling.

Hazy consciousness. The body was also not listening to orders.

It felt as if the entire body was tied up with chains, but at the same time it felt different from that sacred chain of silver she had experienced before.

Rather than tying up the body externally, the chain felt like it was produced from within.

Using human terms -- this probably felt like an illness like the flu.

But it was completely pointless to consider such a possibility, it was naturally impossible.

Though vampires could get hurt, the concept of disease did not exist for them.

If one really had to force a comparison, only the desire for fresh blood barely counted.

Even though it was a phenomenon resembling instinct, it was not unreasonable to view it as a disease. And if blood was not sucked, the body's sense of fatigue would increase.

Nevertheless, she had already fed her fill this morning. At midday it was a minor amount, but that counted as a second time.

In terms of volume it should be sufficient, but her body felt powerless.

What on earth -- what was going on?

As questions swirled in her mind, a sweet fragrance could be smelled at this time.

It was a bewitching aroma which was so strong it gave headaches.

"What is happening...?"

As if guided by the scent, Rushella sat up on the bed.

She first surveyed her surroundings and found herself in an unfamiliar room.

The room's furnishings were white and clean, with many cabinets filled with medicine. There were curtains separating the beds -- even though she had never been here before, this should be the 'infirmary,' right?

Searching her memories, the last image she had was being held in Hisui's arms.

He was probably nearby -- Rushella looked to the right of the bed with that faint hope.

Entering her view was only the white curtain which marked the boundaries between beds.

Through the curtain, a person's silhouette could be seen.

At the same time, that aroma wafted over. It resembled the burning of incense. Purple smoke could be vaguely seen floating towards here from outside the curtain.

"Who are you......?"

"Lowly vampire, you are not worthy of knowing my name."

The voice sounded like an old woman's and a young girl's at the same time. Through the curtain, the other person's appearance could not be discerned, not even her figure or the contours of her face.

"How dare you speak to me in such a manner. Hurry and show yourself!"

Rushella roared and reached out to pull the curtain. But even though her words were intimidating, her movements were slow. The aroma was disrupting her thoughts.

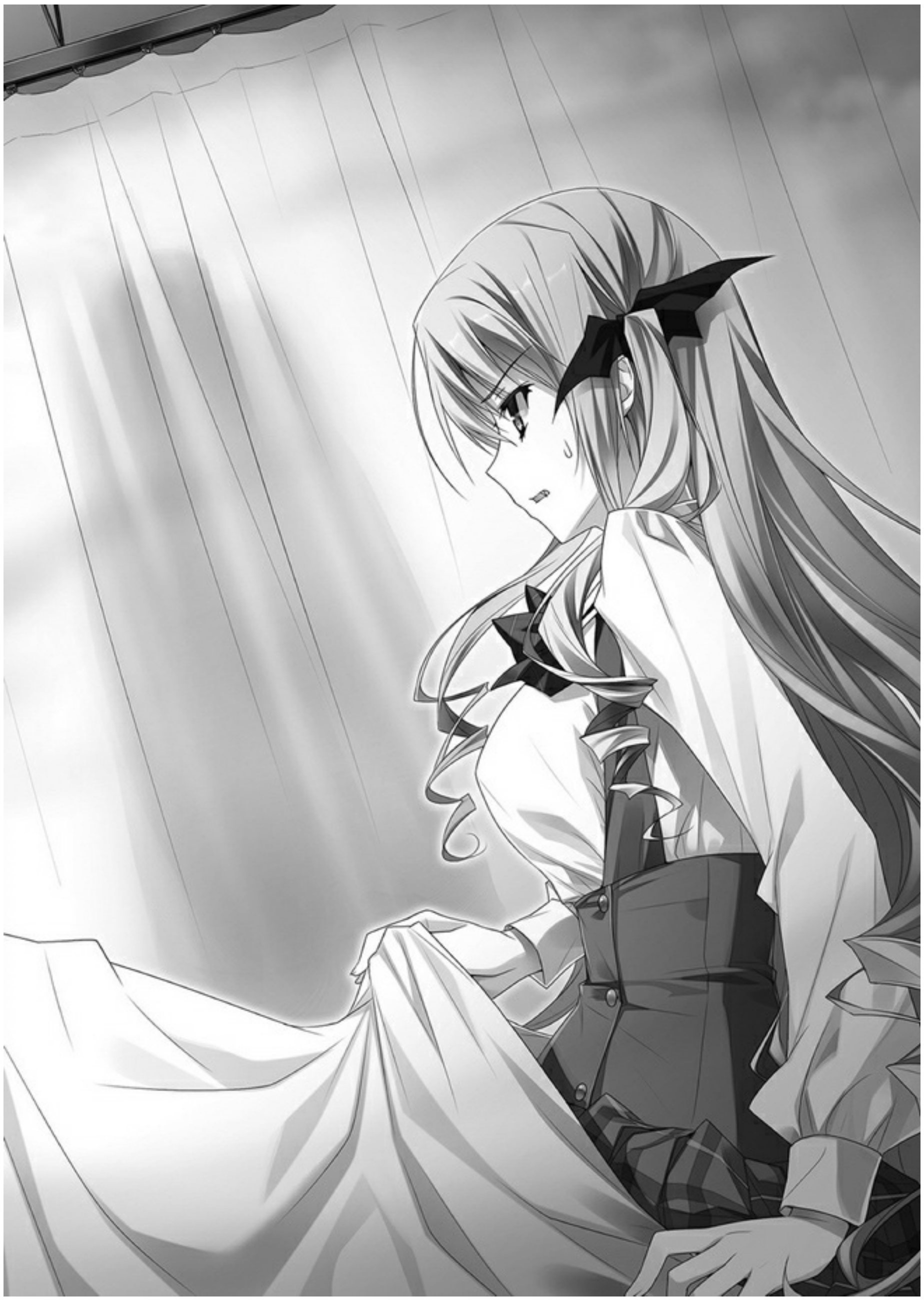
".......!"

Pulling the curtain aside -- there was no one there.

Only an old-fashioned candle holder with a burning purple candle, its flame flickering gently.

"How......"

Rushella murmured softly and noticed someone behind her at the same time.



Turning around, she found that "person" standing in the corner of the room.

Based on appearance she should be female, but Rushella could not be completely certain. This was due to her confused thoughts, plus the fact that the person's entire body was clad in a quaint red robe, only exposing the face which was turned towards Rushella. Her head was also covered by a hood that not only obscured her gaze but made her expression impossible to read.

"...Your attire is really quaint. During the times when we vampires dominated the world, there were many fellows who looked like you, displaying wondrous magic. It is recorded in my memory."

"Correct... I am a reviver of lost arts. However, there is no need for your race to revive. Why have you returned? Why... are you in this school?"

"Who knows? I'd like to ask too, who on earth am I?"

"Let's not joke around......"

She extended a hand out from her robe, as white as snow. Even though her age could not be determined from her voice, that skin clearly belonged to a woman in the prime of youth.

She manifested a black sphere the size of a marble in her hand and shot it at Rushella.

"......!"

Instinctively, she realized danger. Rushella slid her hand into the inside of her skirt. When wearing her uniform, that was where she kept her favorite short sword.

Before the sphere arrived, she threw the sword to intercept it.

The instant the blade struck the sphere, tiny sparks scattered as purple flames appeared out of space.

"What......!?"

The purple flames were not large and quickly vanished in the air. But accompanying the rise in fragrance was a numbing of Rushella's five senses.

"This aroma... Like just now... But stronger... Who on earth are you?"

"For now, just call me -- Witch. Your race is not the only one that lives in modern society."

"I see... A remnant of ancient spellcasters? But why are you treating me as an enemy?"

"It is you who has intruded into my territory. Scram and go back to where you came from. Otherwise -- I shall execute you right here."

Leaving these words behind, the "Witch" twirled her long robe and jumped out the window.

Rushella wanted to chase after, but her sluggish body could not keep up with her will.

The increasingly intense aroma in the room made her eyelids feel heavier and heavier.

Gritting her teeth, Rushella could do nothing as her consciousness sank into darkness.

"......So, the biology room seems to be missing a specimen. I heard it was a precious item sent as a gift from a former teacher. If anyone finds it, please hand it over to a teacher~ What does it look like? ...Seems to be similar to this, kept in a jar, submerged in formaldehyde. The shape looks kind of like ginseng? Everyone please help look for it."

The home economics lesson ended, it was currently a classroom meeting. Jyuri's child-like voice, most unfitting for a teacher's, resounded within the classroom.

Perhaps because no one was interested in the subject, none of the students paid serious attention.

Normally the lessons almost never took place in the "biology room." That place was basically equivalent to a storeroom. Very likely, under the student council, or rather, Kirika's investigation, that room was going to disappear.

"Then the meeting will conclude here~"

With her cute voice, Jyuri declared the conclusion of today's classes. The students began to leave the classroom successively, heading home from school or hurrying to their clubs. On the other hand, Mei and Eruru remained behind in the classroom.

"...So why did Rushella feel unwell, Eruru-chan?"

"...I am not sure. Also, Sudou-san, could you stop calling me 'Eruru-chan' please? I am in the same grade as you!"

Eruru spoke as she pushed her glasses, while Mei protested stubbornly.

"What does it matter? Don't get me involved into the stratified social class distinctions of the police. By the way, where's Hi-kun?"

"He went over to Rushella. She is a vampire after all, so I do not believe it is anything serious... Why is he so concerned?"

During lessons in the afternoon, Eruru had been thinking about this matter.

If she was simply feeling unwell there was no cause for concern, but for a vampire the chance of this was essentially close to zero.

In other words, she must have eaten something that caused a vampire's body to show abnormal symptoms.

"Before the symptoms appeared, what did she eat... First there was Kujou-san's blood, this should be safe. Considerate of Rushella's blood sucking, he even avoids eating garlic all the time, right?"

"That's right. That guy seems to have engraved his servant identity into his bones. Then it must be the thick soup? But I found it quite tasty, no problem there."

"That is the only thing left to consider. But we brought the ingredients ourselves and the soup base was bought at the market. The seasonings might vary between people but that should not be an issue. Naturally, garlic or the like was not added, right?"

"Of course not. Hi-kun was very attentive, besides, the girl herself would surely have noticed. At such close range, even Eruru-chan's sense of smell can understand, right?"

"...Indeed. Looks like the reason of her feeling unwell surely must lie within that home economics classroom. But what on earth caused her to......"

Eruru began to ponder in earnest as Mei watched her with a meaningful expression.

"...What is it?"

"Nothing much. I'm just surprised you would ponder so seriously about vampires, your greatest hate. If it was a while back, Eruru-chan would surely have said, vampires should die on their own for all I care... Am I right? You've been influenced by Hi-kun?"

"S-Stop making fun of me! It is not what you think, not at all......"

Eruru murmured softly and avoided her gaze as Mei continued to stare at her with amusement.

"I-I am simply worrying about the issue itself!"

"The issue itself?"

"...Humans were fine but only the vampire showed symptoms. If this was deliberate, then that someone must possess specialized knowledge and skills for targeting supernatural creatures."

"......"

"If that person only aimed to destroy a supernatural creature, there is not too much cause for concern. However, this power... is very dangerous, extremely dangerous......"

Seeing Eruru fall silent, Mei also got serious. Switching to a solemn expression, she offered encouragement as an external collaborator of the Supernatural Investigations Section.

"I will assist you, but just not for free."

"No specific clues have been found yet. In any case, we should also go over to Kujou-san. I am also a bit concerned about her condition."

Eruru got up from her seat. At the same time, a strange visitor arrived in the classroom.

Making cute meowing sounds, a black kitten had slipped into the room.

"Oh my, what a cute kitten. Did you get lost?"

Mei reached out to the black kitten as if trying to lead it out of the room.

As she approached the black cat before them.

Eruru was only watching casually to begin with, but recalling yesterday's scene, she immediately called out sharply to stop Mei.

"Stop... Get away from it!"

"Huh?"

As Mei turned her head in surprise, the black cat appeared next to her face.

It had instantly jumped onto her shoulder.

From its movements it seemed completely weightless. Mei and Eruru were taken aback for a moment.

However, the cat's voice clearly reached their ears.

"You two... are also the vampire's companions?"

The two girls looked at each other in shock.

Unmistakably, a human voice was coming from the cat's mouth.

It resembled an elderly woman's and a young girl's, completely indiscernible. The only certain fact was it being female.

"If you are the vampire's companions -- make haste and begone. Or else..."

"Or else?"

Eruru slowly approached to restrain the cat. In the worst case, she would not shy from using the bullets of her beloved sacred gun, "Argentum." This was a weapon chambered with bullets of silver, though specialized for vampires, it was still similarly effective against other supernatural creatures.

"Die."

The cat jeered.

Clearly a cat's body, but the face resembled a human's. It carried what felt like a human's expression.

Facing that smug look, even Eruru and Mei felt a shred of terror despite their unyielding fortitude.

In the next instant, the cat jumped down from Mei's shoulder and spat out something towards the ground. Then it left the classroom with quick and fleeting footsteps.

"What was that... just now?"

"......"

"It spoke, right...? What could it be, a cat demon? Or a cat spirit!?"

"No, probably just an ordinary cat. The only thing special about it is that it is a 'familiar.' Or call it a messenger."

"What... Eh, is that ventriloquism!? Coordinating with the cat's movements, someone else is speaking nearby!? Or someone is performing a magic trick?"

"There is definitely a trick and a punchline, but it is definitely no magic performance."

Eruru fished out a handkerchief and picked up what the cat spat out.

It was an ancient piece of parchment.

Spreading out the parchment which had been folded repeatedly, it revealed the same magic circle she had witnessed with Hisui yesterday, only smaller in size.

From the faint stench, Eruru quickly understood it was made from blood.

There was also a faint aroma of Silver Vine as well as various herbs.

"This is... the punchline? What, making it seem like magic. And using a black cat as a familiar, it's basically like..."

"'Witch'... You are correct."

Eruru's uttering of the word sent a chill down Mei's spine.

"We should hurry and converge with Kujou-san. Investigations must begin as soon as possible."

"Got it...!"

The two hurried out of the classroom and raced towards the infirmary.

Chapter 3 - Witch Hunt

"Are you okay?"

Rushella opened her eyes to find Reina sitting in a chair on the bedside, inquiring with great care. She looked like she had been on watch all this time before Rushella woke up.

"...What, it's you. Where did Hisui go, seriously......"

Tactlessly expressing her dissatisfaction, Rushella sat up. The sense of exhaustion had left. Probably because she just woke up, she felt a little dizzy, but other than that she did not feel anything unusual.

"Now... What time is it? What about class...?"

"It's already after school. I think Kujou-kun should be here soon."

"Really... Wait a minute, where did that woman go!?"

"Woman...? Who? If you mean the health teacher, she seems to be away..."

"No...! That aroma... Is no longer here, hmm? Hey, do you see a candle over there? One that gives off a strange smell..."

"......? I don't see one. The candle you mentioned... Do you mean a scented candle? Ah, I've heard that the school nurse loves those things, whenever depressed students come to her to talk about their troubles, she uses those to help them calm down. See, there's an aromatherapy pot here."

Reina pointed to the school nurse's desk and said. Just as she described, that sort of equipment was sitting right there.

"No, not that kind of thing... It must have been put away..."

The room was devoid of all signs of the "witch."

"Spending so much effort to ambush me... How bold for a human."

"Excuse me... Did something happen? Are you really... okay? Umm, could it be because of my cooking..."

Reina asked with an apologetic expression. Very likely, her heart had been burdened with worry throughout her afternoon classes.

"No... It's unrelated to that. Besides, I'm not the only one who tried your cooking, both you and Hisui ate it too. The taste was not bad, you know?"

"...Really? That's good to know......"

"Don't be concerned with these inane things. Wasn't Hisui enjoying the taste too?"

"Yes..."

As soon as Hisui's name was mentioned, Reina seemed happy yet embarrassed.

Something about her smile sent Rushella's heart into turmoil.

"What is with you... Did something happen to Hisui?"

"N-Nothing...... Umm, you two... Live together, right?"

"That's right, that guy is my servant!"

Hearing Rushella's usual catchphrase, Reina's expression became slightly gloomy.

"Right... You two are always together, your relationship must be so close..."

"......? Well, good enough. Although that guy is not too obedient, he is at least willing to take care of my everyday life. That guy, whenever I finish taking a bath, or when I go to his room in the morning, he's always staring at my body nonstop."

"......"

Simply picturing the scene in her mind made Reina's face blush as red as an apple. Steam was almost rising from her head. However, there was a sense of loneliness in her expression.

"That's right too... Rushella-san's... Figure is so outstanding......"

"Well, good enough. One day, I will make sure that guy grovels and worships me completely!"

Rushella proudly expressed her wish while Reina lowered her gaze and stood up.

"...I'm glad you're okay. Then I'll... be taking my leave."

"......? Sure......"

Avoiding Rushella's gaze, Reina hurried out -- but ran into Hisui at the door of the infirmary.

"Eh, Class Rep? What's up, why do you look so sad?"

"Kujou-kun..."

A ray of hope appeared on Reina's depressed face.

But soon, she shyly averted her gaze and quickly moved away.

"Rushella-san seems to be fine now... I'll be leaving first..."

"Ah, sure..."

Hisui watched in puzzlement as her figure receded in the distance.

Then just as he turned around and was about to enter the room.

"Too slow!! Why didn't you arrive earlier!?"

Rushella threw her pillow as hard as she could.

This almost dented his face as a loud roar, most unfitting for the infirmary, accompanied the violent act.

"What are you doing! What would it matter if I arrived earlier or later, aren't you fine already!?"

"I was in trouble! I mean, I was attacked by someone just now!?"

"Huh--!? What, another vampire!?"

"No, it's probably a..."

"A 'witch,' is it?"

"Kariya......"

Turning around, Hisui found Eruru and Mei standing behind him. Based on their argument just now, Eruru seemed to have figured out the situation.

"Looks like we have gotten involved with the same person."

"What? I didn't get involved with anything? If I had to say it, the only ones recently are you three sources of misfortune, vampires and artificial humans."

Ignoring Hisui's retort, Eruru walked over and sat down on the chair in the infirmary. Then she began talking with an inscrutable expression.

"I was hoping my secret investigation would turn up with nothing... But now it looks like I must investigate seriously. Can you tell me in detail what happened earlier here? We will also tell you what we ran into so far."

"This is what's known as 'information exchange,' right? Fine, I'll tell you."

Over the course of a few minutes, Rushella and Eruru exchanged news on the strange occurrences that happened to them after the cooking practical.

Understanding that the threat they encountered was real beyond a doubt, they nodded to each other.

Then Eruru stated her conclusions.

"This school -- harbors a "witch." And this true "witch" is hostile towards vampires."

Hearing Eruru's statement, both Rushella and Mei, both having encountered the "witch," showed tensed expressions... Only Hisui casually raised his hand, completely puzzled.

"Sensei, I have a question."

"...What question?"

"Even though I haven't run into her... Oh, I'm not doubting her existence, but why hasn't she come looking for me?"

"You want to meet her?"

"Not really, I also hope she'd ignore me, but I'm just a bit curious."

"She views vampires as enemies, and that one by your side... Well, anyone slightly knowledgeable would realize her true identity. Given such a peculiar name."

"Your description is truly rude."

"Naturally, the other party will be concerned, whether there are other vampires apart from her. Hence, very unfortunately, Sudou-san and I who are always hanging around her were judged to be companions, and were warned. That is essentially what happened. As for you, there is no point in giving a warning. You look like a servant no matter what. Even within school, your blood has been sucked a good many times, right? Are you confident that you were never seen?"

"Zero confidence."

Recalling various "blood-sucking occasions," Hisui shook his head in anguish.

On the first day of class, a group of girls, headed by Reina, already witnessed the scene of an aborted blood-sucking. Even if no one else saw firsthand, the news would have spread amongst all the other students.

"...What, so you're saying she has already condemned me without a trial!?"

"Were I in her place, I too, would have skipped the Miranda warning of 'You have the right to remain silent' etc and arrested you directly, perhaps even rewarding you with a bullet during the process. Please pay attention."[1]

"Uh sorry, have you heard of the term, human rights?"

"...? Ah, excuse me, you are actually human?"

Hisui could only shut up obediently in response to Eruru's serious question.

It looked like he should be more careful from now on, on dark and stormy nights.

"But... 'Witches' or whatever, do they really exist? I think stuff like witchcraft is really superstitious, right?"

"Does an artificial human have the right to say that?"

Hisui retorted against Mei's question. However, she proudly puffed out her spectacular chest instead.

"Hey hey, Hi-kun, surely you must have read about my ancestor in the story of Frankenstein? Artificial humans clearly count as the product of science. There are people who call the book the world's first science fiction novel!"

"But at the same time, there are people who call him a modern homunculus. Besides, from the perspective of science, how is life actually created? And if it really was a product of science, why was that first generation creature so ugly beyond belief? I think it's much closer to magic instead."

"Then it's a union of science and magic. You can call it a hybrid."

"You must be kidding. By the way, what is your body even made of? Ah, I'm simply curious. Even though it feels completely like a normal human's to the touch, but that... Material or the sort, how is it actually made......"

Hearing this question, Mei's expression stiffened.

It was an uncharacteristically serious expression.

"What are your intentions in asking that?"

She replied in a completely emotionless tone.

"Nothing... Forget about it. That's better for everyone."

"Of course, it's better that way. So... In the end, do 'witches' really exist? Even if they existed, what dangers do they pose?"

"Witches do indeed exist. However, white witches who only use herbs and cast spells; black witches who contract with demons and summon disaster -- this sort of categorization is meaningless. True witches are neither white nor black. They are beings who inherited ancient rituals instead of adhering to any religion's ideology -- if one were to define witches, it would be something like that."

Hisui nodded in agreement with Eruru's explanation.

"I also heard from my foster parent who personally witnessed witch hunts in Europe. Those people who were rounded up and persecuted as witches, virtually none of them were actually real witches. But there seems to be an extremely small number of witches amongst them. To the people involved in the hunt, that was sufficient to achieve their goals. Even if it meant sacrificing tens of thousands of innocents, so long as a real witch is not let loose, it was considered worth it. And even if they were not able to exterminate the witches completely, as long as the beings known as 'witches' were banished to the remote corners of history, it was enough to send their power into decline. Like vampires, modern society in this country no longer has pure witches. Even if there were, they are simply amateurs who learned from some grimoire or through oral tradition."

"...That sounds about right. I do not believe there are real witches who could completely revive the ancient rituals of old. However, someone is at least capable of making a vampire faint... As well as reaching a level of producing illusions we can see. Furthermore... She is in this school. We must find her before the incident escalates. In any case, let us start investigating places where there might be clues. We will split up..."

"Then I'm going to team up with Hi-kun❤"

Mei immediately wrapped herself around Hisui's left arm, pressing her enormous bosom against him.

"Stupid thing, the one who belongs in his team is me! Let's go, Hisui, and catch this insolent culprit who dared to poison me!"

Refusing to be outdone, Rushella embraced Hisui's right arm. For some reason, she also positioned her bosom with the same posture as Mei's.

"...Excuse me, I'm sorry. I'm going to team up with Kariya. You two go with each other."

" "Eh~~!?" "

The beautiful duo exploded with indignant protests as Hisui struggled free with great difficulty to recover his freedom.

"Let's go, Kariya. You two better show up with some respectable results."

Waving his hand, Hisui urged to the other two to get to work. Pulling Eruru by the hand, he hurried out of the infirmary.

Making sure the two girls were not following, he breathed a sigh of relief. Eruru shook free from his hand with displeasure.

"Please do not touch me so casually..."

"Ah... Sorry. I wanted to start investigating with you before the situation got even more troublesome."

Hisui's careless remark made Eruru blush instead.

Very quickly, she returned to her usual composure and spoke in calm tones.

"What do you mean by that? If you are worrying about my body's condition, it is unnecessary."

"I don't think you'd make the same mistake twice anyway. But if I want to get things done seriously, I think it's most efficient to team up with you. Even though leaving Rushella alone definitely worries me... There's Sudou accompanying her after all. That girl is pretty smart so even if the sky were to fall down, her brute force should be able to support and hang on."

"Your small-minded cleverness never ceases. I understand, then let us begin."

After assigning roles, Eruru sprang into action with Hisui following close behind her.

With silent understanding they required no talking to know where they ought to search.

This was the scene of the incident, the home economics classroom -- as well as the preparation room next door.

Since they knew that Jyuri was suddenly asked to cover the class, this meant that the original teacher was absent. Even more fortunately, the room was not locked either.

Silently nodding to each other, they slipped into the home economics preparation room.

This was where the home economics teacher usually prepped for class. It was also the room where various teaching resources and cooking ingredients were managed. Naturally, it also contained a fridge.

Rather than the size of a usual fridge for home-use, it was only a mini-sized model usually used by singles. In terms of appearance, it was identical to the fridges in other preparation rooms and the staff room. Nothing suspicious about it.

Hisui opened the door and check the inside of the fridge.

First to enter his view were potatoes and carrots, the same ingredients as those used in the cooking practical today.

"I think no one forgot to bring their own ingredients, so the backup portion in the fridge was unused?"

"Right. Even though she is a witch, knowledgeable in all sorts of magical herbs... It would still pose a tough challenge for her to make a move on the ingredients we brought ourselves."

"Since Rushella did not notice any problems when she was eating, that means it did not contain any garlic or holy water. In other words, the problem did not arise from using foods that target the weaknesses of vampires, and neither were church-related items used... Could it be a magical herb innovated by witches?"

Hisui confirmed the already established facts as he continued to examine the interior of the fridge.

Other than ingredients, the only thing left was backup soup base prepared in case of forgetful students.

No other ingredients related to today's cooking practical were found.

"Nothing useful eh... Well, the things the teacher prepared were not used after all."

"In other words, for someone who did not participate in the cooking practical, making a move on the fridge ingredients beforehand would be meaningless. This means it must be someone at the scene and within your group to have the opportunity."

"...Let's not rush to conclusions. After all, people from other groups were going around observing, right? Even though I didn't notice anyone suspicious, then again, I never expected Rushella to faint so I wasn't paying much attention to begin with."

"...The possibility exists, if that is what you believe."

"You don't sound convinced. Well then, let's think about other suspicious areas. What if instead of the food, it was the utensils that were poisoned?"

"True, the utensils were provided by the school... But there was no way of knowing ahead of time who would use which. Even if poisoned, making sure the poisoned utensil reached the target would require the perpetrator to be one of those present at the scene."

"Sudou and I were the ones who laid out the utensils, then Class Rep portioned out the food. Drinks were poured into freshly unsealed paper cups, so they should be fine."

"In that case, we should investigate the pot...... But that should have been washed already."

It would be rather excessive to call it destruction of evidence -- but all the cooking utensils had already been washed and cleaned. Since no flasks could be found in the fridge, they must be together with the knives, forks and dishes, being washed.

"I suppose if we call in forensics to help out, they should be able to analyze it... Right?"

"Substantial obstacles stand in the way. Sure, there would be no problem for me to take things here to them for analysis. But simply taking one or two articles would be pointless. Furthermore, since this incident has not been made public, confiscating everything as evidence for investigations... Is impossible."

"I guess we need to narrow down the approximate area first, then hand in the suspected evidence... That's the most we could do."

Just as Hisui summed up, the home economics preparation room's door was suddenly opened.

The two intruders jumped in surprise and braced themselves for the visitor.

Under their gaze, Kirika entered.

A paper bag under one arm, she was holding the key to the room in her hand. Most likely a key obtained through proper channels.

"Eh, why is this open...... What are you two doing here?"

"Uh, this is......"

As Hisui stammered, Eruru pushed him aside and replied calmly and fluently.

"Actually, we forgot something in the home economics class room... We were thinking that if the teacher picked it up, it would probably be kept here, so we came over to look for it."

"...I see. But coming here on your own when the teacher is not around is not quite proper, would you not agree?"

"It is our fault for being too impatient... We will be more mindful in the future."

Eruru bowed her head and apologized.

Her perfect acting skills made Hisui feel like applauding in standing ovation.

Kirika appeared to have accepted the explanation and did not lecture any further.

"Be more mindful next time."

"Yes... By the way, why are you here, vice-president?"

"I am delivering something for the teacher. The teacher asked me to prepare scented candles, essential oils, as well as this herbal tea I made."

Kirika pointed to the paper bag in her arms. Setting the bag on the teacher's desk, she left a note.

"Now everything is done..."

"...Vice-president, why does the teacher want these things? You said... She asked you to prepare them?"

"It is the teacher's hobby. It seems like she fell in love with them recently at other teachers' recommendation. Quite a fad has hit the staff room, apparently."

"That teacher's personal hobby... Then why were you sent here, vice-president?"

"Because my father is in the import business of assorted goods, so he has access to rare items. As the middleman, I help the teacher purchase what she wants and delivers them here."

"I see. But you also mentioned that you made herbal tea yourself... What is that about?"

Playing the role of an inquisitive and innocent underclassman... Eruru continued the conversation.

Thanks to Eruru's perfect acting skills, Kirika did not mind answering her questions one after another.

"This is my hobby. When my grandmother used to grow herbs, I often helped her out and naturally learned how to use them through the process. I treated the teacher once and she loved it after one taste. Thereafter, I began to send her some quite regularly. Perhaps she might even treat you some day? I have heard that when she makes snacks during cooking practicals, she treats the students to herbal tea."

"...I see. You must be quite close with the teacher."

"Because the student council's teacher adviser pretty much ignores me... But this teacher often listens to my problems. She is also quite familiar with the maintenance of the flower beds, so we share a common language, so to speak. I simply give her the things I love as a return gift. Furthermore, I help the teacher prepare the water used for cooking, borrow tea ware and stuff like that."

"...I see."

Eruru's eyes flashed with insight behind her glasses. Even though her expression was still that of an innocent junior, there seemed to be a subtle change.

"I am leaving now, so you two better leave soon. Since the teacher is not here, you should not be staying behind. Lost and found articles should all be kept in the cabinet over there."

"Thank you. We will leave as soon as we check it."

Eruru watched with all smiles as Kirika left.

After shutting the door, once Kirika's footsteps faded completely, Eruru instantly undertook a thorough ransacking of the cabinet to investigate.

"...What are you doing?"

"Is it not obvious? Looking for evidence. Hmm... Since there are so many articles, if we take a little of each, no one should notice. We must take them for analysis immediately."

Eruru was holding in her hand what Kirika described as the teacher's hobby -- scented candles, jars filled with essential oils, as well as containers holding herbal tea leaves.

Laying out the three types of objects on the table, she placed them into plastic bags and test tubes, her motions exactly like a police gathering evidence from a crime scene. Apparently for the sake of investigation missions, she always kept these tools by her side.

"Say... Those things you have there, aren't they unrelated to the cooking practical today?"

"Indeed, scented candles and essential oils are unrelated. Even if the scented candles were lit somehow to make us smell the released gas -- we would notice because of the scent. Even if the aroma was extremely faint, it would have been impossible to evade either my or the vampire's sense of smell. Also, today our teacher did not bring out herbal tea during the practical."

"Then why are you doing this?"

"You still do not understand? There is no need to ingest these things directly into the body. Through the assistance of other herbs, it would have been enough to make these substances enter the vampire's body by some other way."

"Wait a minute, how could these three things help achieve that? Hypnotize the vampire and make her drink the drug herself?"

Hisui asked jokingly and Eruru answered softly.

"Not wrong, but not entirely correct either. There is no need to hypnotize the vampire herself. Since the vampire did not ingest it, she would not have been hypnotized. However... The impromptu substitute teacher -- could have been hypnotized."

Hisui stared wide with his eyes.

The ancient legends of witches -- even without being an expert, having received knowledge from his foster parent who had once experienced life in the same era as witches, Hisui understood what Eruru implied.

"Whether essential oils or herbs, both are specialties passed down from ancient witches. Using their effects, enhanced by a little magic, simple suggestions could be made to the teacher, thus achieving the goal of manipulation. That is what you mean, right?"

"Exactly. The teacher could have been moving between groups matter-of-factly, examining the process and results of cooking. If she had any ill intent, she could have done anything she wanted."

"That's possible. But why would she tell us something so crucial to the puzzle? If the vice-president were a witch, she should know that you and I are Rushella's friends, right?"

"Your suggestion is reasonable. However, she could have deliberately said it to dispel suspicion. Regardless, it is possible that what she brought in the paper bag today are simply ordinary items. However, the ones left behind in this room from previous uses might be different. I do not expect scientific analysis to be able to explain the techniques used by witches, but if the analysis identifies components that are either unbelievable scientifically contains unknown matter, then a conclusion can be reached."

"......I see. How thoroughly thought out."

Hisui crossed his arms, nodded and exclaimed. Compared to Eruru whose mind had been in motion all this time, he seemed completely unproductive.

"Go and use your brain a little! Nothing is completely certain at this point. Hurry and help think if there is other evidence we might have overlooked?"

Eruru pointed to a plastic bucket in the corner of the room.

The trash from the cooking practical was emptied every couple days, but today's trash was still in the bucket.

Hisui understood what Eruru meant and twisted his face with disgust.

"You're asking me to trawl through the trash!?"

"In a certain sense, all the evidence could be there? Hurry, since your brain is useless, then contribute a little with your brawn."

Eruru commanded mercilessly, her tone of voice offering no room for compromise.

With great reluctance, Hisui started to go through the trash.

As a minimum safety precaution, he was wearing the rubber gloves from the sink in the home economics classroom as he fished around in the plastic bucket.

"What, isn't this all vegetable leaves? This shouldn't be related, right?"

"Then you go find something else suspicious. Are you saying because it's the same type you can't differentiate at all?"

"What do you mean by that, are you calling me trash!?"

"Ah, excuse me, I went too far."

"...As long as you know it."

"I was apologizing to the trash."

"Eh----!?"

Just as Hisui was shocked to hear he was worse than trash, he found something that felt different from vegetable leaves.

Holding his breath, he fished out the object -- a paper bag small enough to hold in the palm of the hand.

Through the paper bag, one could tell that it contained shredded leaves of some plant.

A Japanese tea bag, or some herbal tea liked by the home economics teacher?

Just as Hisui examined it in his hand, Eruru wrapped it up in tissue paper and snatched it away from the side.

"Say......"

"Anything else suspicious?"

"Nothing else found yet......"

"Then conclude the investigation there for now. I will also take this for analysis. Is there any other location you can think of?"

Hearing Eruru's question, Hisui paused for a moment before he replied.

"There's one more I suppose."

"Where?"

"The library... Or rather, the preparation room in the library."

"Why do I have to team up with you!?"

"I was going to say the exact same thing! This is a rare chance for me to tour the school with Hi-kun, such as the infirmary bed, the sports storeroom, the female changing room, a much anticipated time after school, both dangerous and adult... Or rather, a joyful after school period

I'm looking forward to!"

"What are you planning to do to my servant! As long as the crimson light of my eyes continues to shine, you will never realize your ambitions!"

"What, is that some kind of vampire version of some cliched saying!?"

After several exchanges of arguments, Rushella and Mei went "Hmph!" to each other, turning their faces away and stopped talking.

Vampire and artificial human, this dream team of a pair who held exceptional promise as future Hollywood stars, were on exceptionally poor terms.

Left with no choice but to walk together, Mei started leading the way as Rushella followed behind.

"Where are we going? Do you have any idea at all?"

"Of course not. Well, those two should be able to find something. What I can only do, is the basics of the basics of investigating -- examining the scene of the incident."

"The scene?"

Just as Rushella puzzled, Mei halted her steps.

The pair had arrived at the back yard where Hisui and Eruru had discovered the cat's corpse yesterday.

Mei already heard from Eruru what happened, so she decided to investigate this "scene of the incident" once more.

But no clues were yielded at first glance.

There were no new cat victims, nor similar magic circle patterns.

Visiting here for the first time, Rushella casually wandered the little forest. Then she suddenly opened her eyes wide as she pointed at the ground.

"Hey... Is this a grave?"

"Hmm? ...Ah right, Eruru-chan said that she made a grave every time, right? This should be the one she freshly made with Hi-kun. What about it?"

"Someone offered flowers."

"Eh......?"

With curiosity, Mei looked at the three mounds of soil on the ground. Just as Rushella said, someone had placed several lovely flowers over them.

"Did those two do that...? How thoughtful. By the way, don't they seem to be on quite good terms?"

"...Don't know."

"I never expected them to get along so well? Those two are quite familiar with obscure knowledge, and today they ended up taking action together. Hi-kun is really..."

"I said, I don't know!!"

Rushella roared, causing Mei to stop talking.

Then Rushella left in a huff, a face full of displeasure.

Mei helplessly shrugged and followed instead.

"What, did I push the wrong button?"

"......"

"Even though I don't know what Hi-kun is thinking, we shouldn't underestimate Eruru-chan. In actual fact, she really cares a lot about Hi-kun, you know? Though it's just unclear to what extent."

"So what......"

"Nothing much. Just that compared to a vampire, she is a far better match. I have to pay more attention too."

"What does that... Have to do with me...... After all, that guy serving me is the way it should be......"

This was spoken very softly. It made Rushella's gorgeous figure look even more vulnerable and fragile than usual.

"...Do you really believe that? Then you are really naive and optimistic. Anyway, let's get back on task and help investigate. This started because of you, that's why we're working as a team, you know? What do you know about the 'witch'?"

Mei switched to a serious tone of voice. Perhaps it was pointless to ask Rushella given her lost memories, but she was not a kind-hearted soul who could endure a vampire's willfulness indefinitely.

"...I don't know much. However, my race has had contact with humans apart from feeding on their blood. The humans known as 'witches' were one such group."

"What happened?"

"My race possesses far more resilient bodies than the humans. But regrettably, our 'weaknesses' also make us amazingly fragile. And the techniques for compensating were not entirely created by my race -- rather, it was through human hands."

Rushella raised her favorite parasol and waved it. This was the one she always used outdoors in the daytime.

"This type of sun shading tool was reportedly created by human craftsmen. This possession of mine has gone through special treatment to shade the sun and repel rain. There also exists objects that have been modified as weapons or magical areas, these things often involve the techniques of witches."

"I see......"

In the west, treating witches and vampires the same was deeply ingrained. It was not surprising that humans and vampires would form a kind of symbiotic relationship by harnessing each of their strengths.

"Last time, that Baron guy whom Hisui and I destroyed, I heard that he was applying something to his skin to block sunlight."

"Ah, the sunblock preparation. What about it?"

"Although the modern version is likely different, similar things existed in antiquity. By applying a special ointment to the skin, it allowed temporary freedom of movement under the sun. The manufacturing process was quite unique and extremely important to us, but regrettably our race was not privy to it and could only request the witches for assistance -- reportedly something like that happened."

"Isn't that the witches' secret medication passed down the ages, the 'witches' ointment' version!?"

"Well... Probably. I never knew my race and the witches had such a deep and intertwined history."

Hearing Rushella talk about the past in a rare moment, Mei nodded emphatically.

To be honest, her opinion of the vampire had improved slightly.

But learning these things brought up new questions.

"But why, I wonder why your race had to rely on witches of the human race? Wouldn't it have been simpler to make them subservient using 'mystic eyes' or blood-sucking? Force them to reveal the method of production, or simply make them into servants."

"I believe many members of my race attempted it, but their efforts basically all failed. Probably due to the effects of the 'witch hunts,' witches act with great caution. Furthermore, they are very knowledgeable in ways to handle my race, such as neutralizing the effect of 'mystic eyes' or using poison to weaken us. Even though we possess undead bodies and won't be killed as a result, it does cause severe suffering. Reportedly, there is even a poison which can send vampires into suspended animation like temporary death."

"I see... By the way, aren't you remembering knowledge from the past? Has your memory recovered?"

"...No. This is simply knowledge. Any pure-blooded vampire will know this through their ancestry, but it is simply knowledge, nothing more than that. Even though I can recall it, there is no sense of concreteness......"

Rushella explained, her expression gloomy. She appeared to be telling the truth, that all she recounted was simply knowledge stored in her mind. Other than that, there were no experiences or sensations, only empty knowledge mechanically composed of terms and sentences.

"However... Doesn't this knowledge come in handy now? Even if those two are very knowledgeable, there are things that only you know as the authentic vampire, right? I suppose... Hi-kun would be happy to know?"

"Is that really so... I hope so..."

A hint of delight returned to Rushella's face.

As Mei secretly reprimanded herself for the naive act of cheering up her rival, she continued to comfort Rushella.

"......!"

"What now, why did you stop?"

Almost colliding into Rushella's back, Mei wondered.

Rushella stood there with a severe expression.

She was staring at a corner of a flower bed that was connected to the school building.

"Just now, I mentioned to you a type of poison that could cause a vampire to enter temporary 'death,' right......?"

"...Yes. Different from holy water or garlic... You said it was a poison of witches, didn't you?"

"Yes. My race is very wary of this poison and we know its ingredients. Even though the procedure and exact concoction differs from witch to witch, the most important aspect is the raw materials. Without one particular ingredient, the poison cannot be made and there is nothing for my race to fear. I don't know if it is fortune or misfortune, but that ingredient is not only rare, it is also limited to one type."

There was a single flower blooming in the corner of the flower bed.

The flower was conspicuously different from the other plants, isolated in a corner, its purple petals seemingly poisonous.

Greatly alarmed, Rushella was staring at this bell-shaped flower.

"Wait a minute... You don't say... Could it be this very... Thing before our eyes!?"

"Correct... I never expected to find it here."

A flower whose poison posed a threat even towards vampires.

Passed down since ancient times, the poisonous flower of death. Rushella's bright red lips slowly uttered its name.

"The mandrake."

"Pardon our intrusion~"

Even though there were no people present, Hisui still greeted just in case. In an extremely low voice. Even his movements were light and he tried not to make a sound as he walked.

"What are you doing?"

"Ah, just conforming to the atmosphere... Isn't this part of the library?"

"In theory, you are allowed to talk freely in the library preparation room. Of course, it is conditional on the fact that you do not cause any nuisance to the people in the library next door."

Eruru explained. Her voice was also much quieter than usual.

Ending their investigation of the home economics room and its preparation room, the two of them came to the library -- then to the neighboring preparation room.

This was where the librarian did preparatory work and also where students on the library committee who assisted the librarian gathered. In principle, it was closed to outsiders.

Fortunately, Eruru was already appointed to the library committee as soon as she transferred into the school, so they had an excuse if they were caught.

The librarian teacher was not present due to a staff meeting, hence the duo was able to borrow the key from the staff room and slip in here. Luckily, no other students saw them.

"But why come to this place? I have been here a few times due to my duties... But I do not think this place has any clues related to the incident. You cannot possibly believe there might be the likes of grimoires here, right?"

"...That possibility cannot be denied completely, but that's not the reason I felt concerned. This is what I'm talking about."

Hisui pointed at the depths of the room.

A massive bookcase stood before the wall, marking off an empty space that a person could fit through.

The bookcase was virtually packed with books, all of their covers discolored from age, with many of them showing signs of damage.

"This place... Is a restricted area, right? In principle, none of the books in here are in circulation and can only be read within the library with prior authorization...... Indeed there are many ancient or rare books, but is there problem there?"

"No no, what's key is behind the bookcase."

Hisui stepped behind the bookcase. Because the bookcase was not standing against the wall, there was a dim and narrow space behind it.

"Is this your first visit here?"

"Yes... But it is just a store room anyway."

Just as Eruru described, the place was filled with various unsorted articles. Covered with dust, it would take a lot of work to clean up or find something in particular.

"Previously, the teacher needed some sort of ancient information, so the class rep was sent to locate it. I noticed she was having a tough time, so I came over to help. Then I discovered this unusual sight, so I happened to ask about what things were kept here."

"...What things were kept here?"

"All sorts of things, but mainly -- digests."

"Digests!?"

"Yes. I don't know if the current students still do it or not, but it was those guys from cultural clubs like the Literature Club or the Manga Research Society. Whenever clubs in the past accomplished some sort of achievement and recorded it -- it would probably be here. This includes the Occult Research Club."

"The Occult Research Club... Such a thing actually existed once in the school?"

"I only heard the vice-president mention it. Of course, it could be unrelated to the current incident and was simply a research club perhaps. But just in case."

Hisui spoke and turned around towards the pile of assorted items.

But the dismal sight of this junk pile instantly killed his enthusiasm.

"...I guess let's leave instead."

"Have you no backbone?"

"I think my efforts will be futile."

"Even though I had no hopes for you to begin with, you have disappointed me even further."

Eruru sighed as she walked towards the small mountain of records.

Before her was a messy pile of books with countless open scrolls, booklets scattered all over the floor, unidentified carton boxes -- but Eruru stepped forward fearlessly.

"I get it, I get it, I'll help you then. But this is gonna take forever......"

"Not necessarily. Time to call it a day."

Speaking with her usual poker face, Eruru extracted a booklet from the pile and showed it to Hisui.

"Dark Notebook -- The Occult Research Club's Activity Report --"

The cover had those words written in bright red against a pitch black background -- obviously as different from typical cultural clubs as night from day.

There was no other decoration on the cover other than an isolated line of words. One could not even begin to guess what the contents might record. Compared to the digests of ordinary clubs, this booklet was clearly much thicker and was on the level of a relatively thin book.

"How did you find it!? Your luck is too good!"

"This result came not of luck but the inevitable. Compared to the rest, only this booklet's surroundings lack dust. Very likely, it was recently taken out by someone."

"...I see. But wait a minute, if it was taken out already, why would anyone put it back?"

"Because this room also contains a photocopier, hence they simply copied the entire book or just the parts needed. In order not to arouse suspicion, it was placed back where it was found. Since they put this much effort into it, looks like the contents of this booklet should be promising."

Eruru spoke as she flipped it open and began to browse the contents.

Hisui also drew near her face to have a look.

"...Too close."

"Ah, sorry. But your skin sure is super smooth. How do you maintain it so well?"

Eruru blushed as a result of the near collision with Hisui's face. As Hisui caressed her cheek and exclaimed, she slapped him.

"......Why did you hit me?"

"...Who knows."

Eruru desperately tried to pretend to be calm, but her gentle face suddenly displayed surprise.

In the dead center of the booklet's cover -- red flames suddenly began to burn.

"Wha......!"

"Hey, hurry and get rid of it!!"

Hearing Hisui's yell, Eruru frantically threw away the booklet.

No sooner had the booklet left her hand, flames also shot out from its interior and the entire booklet began to incinerate.

By the time it fell on the floor, most of the pages had burned to ash.

To prevent the fire from spreading, Hisui took off his jacket to cover the booklet and smolder the fire.

Fortunately, the flames only scorched the floorboards slightly without major incident.

"Are you okay!? Did you get burnt..."

"I am fine. But what on earth... This should not be some sort of trap mechanism. This is magic..."

"Could it be the witch's doing as well? Trying to burn to death people who investigate recklessly?"

"This bit of fire would not burn anyone to death. This is simply destruction of evidence, as well as a warning -- it serves the dual purpose of destroying evidence and deliberately letting it be seen, most likely to serve as a warning."

"Looks like we fell for it completely. So what's the result, do the remnants give any clues?"

Before Hisui asked, Eruru was already examining the few pages left behind from the fire.

"Hmm. Based on the binding, the content and structure of the writings, there is no doubt this is a digest written by high school students."

"...Eh."

"However, the content inside is the real deal."

"What!?"

Eruru lifted one of the less heavily damaged pages for Hisui to look at.

Although the page was heavily scarred, the things drawn on it were still discernible -- a magic circle.

It was identical to the one they had found at the scene of the dead cat.

On the bottom of the page, there were even explanations about sorcery and the magic circle.

Just as Eruru described, this was a digest at best. It was far too crude to be called a grimoire.

Nevertheless, its content happened to explain the phenomena observed yesterday.

Eruru read out the words on the page indifferently.

"Place the corpse of a small animal on top of the magic circle drawn using blood and cast a simple revival spell. This imbues the corpse with simulated life, for at most a day, allowing it to be commanded as a simple familiar. However, the familiar's actions are limited to extremely simple behavior. Also the revival itself is particularly difficult and prone to failure. Furthermore, preparing the corpse is no easy task. This is only simple basic magic, to be improved upon... That is what is written there."

"It really turns out to be magic...... And with explanations written by an alumnus......!"

"Based on the underlying page, this was written ten years ago. Members of the club... Cannot be read, it is burnt. However, this is...!?"

Eruru was greatly surprised.

Hisui shifted his gaze towards the booklet and confirmed the name.

Then the two exchanged glances and in order to prove to each other they were not imagining things, they pointed at the spot to confirm again.

At the location where their fingers indicated, was written a most familiar name.

-- Horie Jyuri --

It was the name of Hisui's homeroom teacher.

It was the only readable name at the bottom of the member list.

"Horie-sensei... Was part of the Occult Research Club!?"

"Also... She used to study real magic. This increases our suspect count by one, and a massive suspect at that."

Eruru murmured lightly. At that moment, the vibrating sound of her muted cellphone could be heard from the pocket from the inside layer of her clothing.

"It is Sudou-san's text. They seemed to have discovered something... Let us go hurry."

"Yes."

Taking the booklet, the two left the preparation room of the library.

Following Mei's text message, they made haste towards a corner of a flowerbed connected to the school building.

As soon as they arrived--

"There's a mandrake growing here!!"

Rushella reported with great pride.

Eruru's poker face was unfazed, but Hisui displayed great disbelief in his gaze.

"I say, Rushella-san, by mandrake you mean that particular plant right? Even people who don't know much about the occult should know, it is a notorious poisonous plant, almost counts as a fantasy creature, in any case it's that super famous thing, right?"

"Correct, indeed it is. Even though I'm not clear on the little tricks of humans, even for vampires, this plant is extremely dangerous!"

"Does infamy = danger? Well, I cannot deny this viewpoint completely... But how could that kind of thing possibly grow in a place like this......"

"Are you doubting my eyes!? Indeed it seems to be a rare and precious thing, but the truth stands before your eyes!"

"Even if you say so... I'm not very sure, but shouldn't the mandrake's growing conditions be particularly stringent? Like growing beside gallows and further conditions."

"Oh, is that so? Then what is the real story?"

"......Why are you asking me?"

Rushella suddenly passed the ball to Eruru who avoided answering. This was not a good sign.

"Because you seem the most knowledgeable! I'm interested too, what are the mandrake's required growing conditions!?"

"...There are differing explanations, basically, this..."

"This?"

"Places where that thing, from males, that...... Secretion, dripped on the ground, that's where it grows, something like that......"

"Secretion... What is that!? Blood, saliva!? If that's the case, it's very normal to grow here!"

"Ah, n-not the ones you listed, this... is......"

Eruru blushed as she spoke. For some reason, she furtively cast glances at Hisui's lower torso.

"What on earth is it!? Don't be stingy, hurry and tell me!!"

"S-Stop it! Do not stare at me with those pure and innocent eyes......!"

"Then be out with it!"

"I-It is that thing... That...... Male's......"

"Male's what?"

"Sem......"

Halfway through uttering the word, Eruru short-circuited from embarrassment.

Her face was so red it almost seemed like it was about to give off steam. She seemed like she was going to faint.

Fortunately, Hisui stepped forward and caught her.

"...That's enough, stop giving her a hard time."

"Stop interrupting, she was clearly about to say it! People who don't know anything should step aside!"

"...Seeing her reaction, I've pretty much guessed it. Ask Sudou to tell you later."

Hisui spoke as if he figured something out. Eruru finally recovered at this moment and pointed to the flower as she spoke with displeasure.

"Stop that thing from messing around with people's minds. Kujou-san, hurry and uproot it."

"Huh!?"

"Pull it out, then its authenticity can be easily verified by sight. If it is the real thing, it cannot be left alone."

"Ah, that makes sense... So, everyone should know, right? What happens when a mandrake is uprooted?"

The super notorious poisonous plant dating back to antiquity -- and rather than its medicinal properties, it was the plant itself that was most prominent in legends.

Its roots which greatly resembled human form -- in other words, the main body of the mandrake. If pulled out of the soil, the roots emit horrifying shrieks, enough to kill the hearer.

Even someone not particularly knowledgeable about poisonous plants like Hisui knew that.

If it were Mei, even if Eruru and Rushella did not say anything, she would probably know as well.

However--

"What do you mean, uprooted?"

"What does it matter anyway, based on your brilliant insight, it should be a fake anyway, right?"

"Well, that said... You know, just in case...... Right?"

Hisui pitifully sought their consent, but the three girls were completely unmoved by his entreaties, and even retreated backwards.

"Hey hey, that's so unfair! What, this kind of laborious task must be taken up by the guy!?"

"Well this doesn't really count as laborious, but doing your best is right, Hi-kun❤"

Mei sent a sweet and tender smile as encouragement, but she did not want to stay nearby at all.

"Hey, think this over carefully, you three? This is no joking matter, if turns out to be the real deal, isn't it totally unfair to have the weakest one here doing the work!? We have an immortal vampire right here!"

"Don't worry... You are not a man who would die from something so insignificant!"

Rushella cheered Hisui on, clenching her fists, but she did not want to stay nearby at all.

"Why are you showing such trust in this kind of situation!? Hey, you are admitting it's dangerous, right!? Definitely it's dangerous!? Anyway... Did you know, that mandrakes are usually uprooted using dogs......?"

"You dare sacrifice other small living creatures for the sake of preserving your miserable life? How utterly shameless!"

Eruru criticized severely. Naturally, she did not want to stay nearby either.

"Stop talking about principles when all you're doing is securing your own safety first! I don't want to sacrifice little animals either, but at least have some safety precautions? Otherwise, let's not pull it out... Instead, use something like a spade to dig it out together with the surrounding soil. Let's go borrow a spade!"

Hisui tried to negotiate with full seriousness, but the trio ignored him completely.

Or rather... It seemed like they could not hear a single word.

"......?"

Hisui looked carefully.

So that's why they couldn't hear.

Rushella was blocking her ears with her fingers.

Mei had her earphones on, engaged in a conversation.

Eruru was using a portable player to enjoy music.

"You girls are fully equipped!! Can't you even lend me a set of earphones!!"

Hisui's pitiful screams naturally received no answer.

To make things worse, he received a text from an unknown address.

"Hurry and pull it out."

It urged with those words. Based on the tone, it was more than likely Eruru.

"Your first ever text message to me and it turns out to be this!! Like I said, give me a set of earphones at least! I listen to music on my cellphone, but I don't have earphones!!"

...Turning his indignant emotions into a reply text message, he soon obtained a response.

"When you pull out the mandrake, just plug your ears before the 'root' screams, okay? All you need to do is act faster than the speed of sound in air and you will be fine."

"Ah, that's right, I see...... Hey, as if that were possible! You're asking me to move at supersonic speed!? Stepping with the left foot before the right foot touches the ground, and then stepping with the right foot before the left foot lands... That kind of ridiculous theory! This is not scientific!! Besides, plugging the ears with supersonic fingers will definitely burst the ear drums and the semicircular canals, okay!!"

...Turning the above scream into words, he replied, this time receiving a return message signed by all three of the girls.

" " "Stop talking nonsense and pull it out!!" " "

"What is with this powerful triple combo strike...... Isn't it just another way of telling me to go and die!?"

Hisui gave up reasoning with them and had no choice but to turn to the mandrake.

No other choice.

Even if he tried to run, he would surely be caught by one of the three and beaten up viciously.

Taking a deep breath, he inched his way to the flower, one step at a time.

Gripping the root end of the stem tightly, he confirmed the touch and surveyed the surroundings.

Other than Rushella and the girls, there were no others nearby.

The soil where the mandrake grew was quite soft, hence he should easily pull out the 'root' without using too much force.

But the problem was... After that.

If it really were the true thing -- it would scream and yell.

And whoever heard the sound -- would be dead.

"......Whatever!"

Hisui pulled out the 'root' in one go, and immediately threw it up into the air as hard as he could.

Then he ran as fast as he could towards Rushella and the girls.

This series of actions were performed for the sake of getting as far away as possible from the "root." Even a centimeter was better than nothing.

In order to reduce the volume of the death cries as much as possible, he desperately distanced himself.

The plan succeeded.

Probably because he plugged his ears with his fingers, Hisui did not hear a sound, and his body remained fine.

I'm saved -- Hisui could not help but think that. Then he suddenly noticed where the "root" had gone and looked into the air.

"...Eh?"

Having peaked, the "root" was beginning its descent. Seeing its appearance, not only Hisui, but also everyone present were stunned.

According to tradition, the mandrake's roots resembled human form -- but this thing did not look human in any way. It was indistinguishable from a common vegetable.

It was what had been used not too long ago in the cooking practical earlier, a completely ordinary carrot one could find on any dinner table.

As the four gazed blankly, the thing finally landed on the ground.

Eruru was the first to rush to the landing spot to pick up the problematic specimen to show Hisui and the rest.

No matter how you looked at it -- it was a carrot.

"Eh------!?"

Hisui stared so hard his eyes seemed as wide as light bulbs, screaming with surprise. Mei tried hard not to laugh as she patted his shoulder.

"Hey what's with that... carrot!? Hi-kun was so scared he must have crapped in his pants!!"

"Seriously! To have been this scared of a thing like that... Completely unsightly!!"

Rushella joined into reprimand Hisui.

Speaking of which, the whole thing started with her.

"Securing your own safety and now you're lecturing this and that... I was risking my life here!! Anyway, whose low-grade prank is this!? What is this, deliberately disguising a carrot as a mandrake!? Hey Rushella, how did you mistake this for the real thing!?"

Hisui's grumblings came rushing forth like a tide, but Eruru stopped him calmly.

"This is real."

Hisui and the rest were incredulous.

Eruru took the "root"... Or rather, the flower growing out of the carrot to show to them.

"At least the flower is real. Even though I have only seen it in ancient drawings, this is my first time seeing the real thing... If Rushella decided based on this, it should be real beyond a doubt. Of course, the 'root' portion is fake but this is probably not a prank but a type of 'grafting' in gardening. Grafting a mandrake's flower onto a fake, in order to turn the 'root' into the real thing."

"How could something like that succeed......"

Hisui knew nothing about gardening, but his intuition told him it was impossible. If this kind of trick could mass produce the legendary poisonous plant, it would be too easy.

"Just as you say, this is impossible. And in actual fact, it failed. However, the problem is this, indeed there is someone doing this -- namely, the 'witch.' More importantly, since there is a real flower here, then most likely she must possess the real 'root' as well."

Eruru's words made Hisui frown.

The incident just now could be laughed off, but the whereabouts of the all important 'root' that even Rushella was wary off was unknown.

"I have many things I need to verify, but as I thought, there is still not enough information. Furthermore, I am not an expert in magic and have no resources on hand. What sort of place would have this kind of information, and would allow one to sit down and research quietly undisturbed..."

Eruru sighed helplessly. At this moment, Hisui lightly raised his hand.

"What is it?"

"I know a place like that nearby."

"Where?"

All eyes were focused on Hisui. He pointed to himself and said:

"My home."

Translator's Notes and References:

1. Miranda Warning: a warning given by police in the United States to criminal suspects in police custody before they are interrogated to preserve the admissibility of their statements against them in criminal proceedings.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miranda_warning]

Chapter 4 - Spring Training Camp

One night during a certain holiday in May, Hisui's home welcomed its first guests since Rushella moved in.

"...Thank you for your hospitality."

"Same here, thank you for your hospitality."

In stark contrast, Eruru entered expressionlessly as Mei followed cheerfully.

Their luggage were also completely different. Eruru simply carried a medium size travel bag that probably contained bare essentials while Mei lugged a massive trolley case, looking as if she were going to travel abroad.

"What is wrong with you, why do you have to bring so much luggage!? And why did you come along!?"

Rushella stood at the entryway to welcome the two girls. Greatly displeased, she pointed at Mei's large suitcase.

This was Hisui's earlier suggestion, to come to his house to research and organize their information about the "witch" -- but Rushella seemed dissatisfied for some reason, raging away very early in the morning.

"Oh my, need I remind you I am Eruru-chan's assistant? And letting a young man and woman spending time alone under one roof... What if something were to happen?"

"...In my view, being alone with you is when something might happen, it scares me so much..."

Standing firmly in Rushella's camp, Hisui retorted to express his own anxiety.

Eruru's style was direct and expedient, always relying on biting commentary or violence. On the other hand, Mei was disposed to sexual harassment that was impossible to defend against, which was the most troublesome in a certain sense.

"Don't be like that. After all, this is just one part of work, as well as a chance for me to survey my future living conditions."

"...I already know. Anyway, let's go in first."

Helplessly, Hisui let Mei and Eruru into the house.

Mei looked around the house with great interest, poking and touching things here and there.

"Hmm mmm... I see, the rooms are decorated quite tastefully, and very well cleaned too."

"Of course! This is my house after all!"

"What are you feeling proud of, it's probably all Hi-kun's work, right?"

Mei dismissed Rushella's proud declaration but the arrogant vampire remained unfazed.

"It is only natural for my servant to take care of my everyday life, right? The fruits of his labors are my accomplishments!"

"...Hmph. By the way, since all the housework is undertaken by Hi-kun, then he also does the laundry, right? Including hanging them out to dry and folding them?"

"Of course! These menial tasks are his job, naturally."

"...So you don't mind?"

"Mind what?"

Hearing Mei trying to imply something, Rushella asked with puzzlement.

Mei continued with a poker face and pointed out an outrageous fact.

"What about your underwear and the like -- so he dries and folds them too?"

A moment of silence.

Then -- Rushella's face went completely red as she rushed over and grabbed Hisui by his collar.

"You, y-y-you, to think you went that far......!!"

"Eh -- why are you talking about it after all this time!? I thought you didn't care!?"

"So annoying, shut up! You lowly servant, to think you took my u-u-underwear......!"

"Oh my, who knows what he's been doing with them in secret. Say, have you counted them for any missing ones?"

As Mei sadistically added fuel to the fire, Rushella's face went even redder as she pummeled Hisui with her fists.

"It hurts, hey, stop it! Sudou, you stop saying these unnecessary things!"

"Oh my, it must be so stimulating for boys in puberty, right? So what's the situation actually?"

"...Folding that kind of stuff for her personally would be a bit much, so I simply put them in the box in her room. That's always been the case, right?"

Hisui explained as if trying to appease Rushella, prompting her to recall how things had been done.

"...Right, the underwear were always delivered together. I fold them myself..."

"See? Look how thoughtful I am. When washing them I also put your underwear in a separate washing bag......"

"......!!"

As soon as he spoke, Hisui's chin was struck by another of Rushella's punches.

Dazed by the impact, he protested.

"What the heck!?"

"So annoying, shut up!"

Rushella was on the verge of tears.

Mei nodded in agreement and even Eruru, who had been watching uninvolved, spoke up.

"Hi-kun is in the wrong here."

"You are really too insensitive."

"What kind of responses is this from you two!? My life is not easy, okay?! This is simply Rushella's underwear, this is simply Rushella's underwear, this is simply Rushella's underwear... Do you know how many times I have to silently say that to myself and the effort it took to avoid looking at them in order to stay calm? Think about my plight here!"

Hisui cried out emotionally but Mei continued with her trouble-making.

"Truly, you lead a life of suffering. Since you must have washed your foster parent's underwear as well, you should have gotten used to it to a certain extent?"

"...Well, compared to that person's black or red underwear, rich in vampire style and adult flavor, Rushella's pastel-colored ones are more of the cute variety..."

...Before he could finish, Hisui was struck by Rushella's special attack as she sobbed and wept.

Hisui painfully held his face, while Mei and Eruru sighed in exasperation as they watched from the side.

"...This is completely -- entirely Hi-kun's fault."

"Agreed. I have never seen anyone so insensitive."

"......No one will marry me anymore......"

Rushella wailed in a barely audible voice, covering her face with both hands. Only then did Hisui finally understand.

".........Sorry, it's my bad."

Despite Hisui relenting and apologizing, the girl trio's penetrating gazes remained. In order to avoid their scorching glares, Hisui decided to eliminate the issue at its root.

"...By the way, if you don't want me to see your underwear, then wash it yourself! It's not like you have a lot!"

"...Indeed. It might be more troublesome, but compared to letting this guy wash......"

Rushella brushed away her tears as she started agreeing with Hisui's suggestion. But Mei poured more fuel on the dying fires of rage.

"Isn't this actually quite a dilemma? I think you need to consider carefully first?"

"How so?"

Rushella asked, confused. Mei answered with an impish smile.

"Then it's your turn to wash Hi-kun's underwear."

Mei pointed to Hisui's crotch as she spoke.

Rushella's gaze followed her finger -- her cheeks getting hotter and hotter, she started punching Hisui like a sandbag again.

"You, you, y-y-you lowly servant -- ! What are you asking me to do!?"

"Nothing, I didn't ask you to do anything for me! Besides, this is no big deal!! Stop getting so worked up! How innocent are you, really!?"

"So annoying, shut up!!"

Rushella held Hisui against the floor as she continually pummeled him.

"...I knew it, cohabitation isn't really working out for you two, right? How about I switch with her?"

"......No."

"I'm different from this child, you know? Hi-kun, even if you put any underwear with strange sticky substances on them into the washing machine, I will diligently take them out and personally hand wash them for you."

"Give me a break, okay? Could you stop trampling the most sensitive spot in a boy's psyche!?"

"I haven't finished talking yet! You rude fellow!!"

...Then Hisui suffered yet another beating. Finally released, he was met with Eruru's gaze of derision.

"Stop wasting time with such a farce... Where is your foster parent's collection? I would like to get on with the tour, you know?"

"...What's the rush? Waiting a moment wouldn't hurt, right? It's dinner time anyway, so why don't we eat first?"

"I merely wish to get the task done and over with as quickly as possible."

"I understand how you feel, but if you mess up the meal schedule, Rushella's gonna throw another tantrum. Could you accompany us for dinner first, okay?"

"...Understood."

Eruru compromised reluctantly and took a seat at the dinner table with Mei.

On this rare occasion with so many people for dinner, the meal was Japanese hotpot.

Using chicken broth as the soup base, the hotpot's main course consisted of chicken meatballs. Neatly arranged green vegetables floated amidst the white and tender soup.

"Okay, please enjoy the meal."

Hisui spoke as he brought the pot to the table. For Rushella, this dinner was a first experience since her awakening -- the very first time for her to share a meal at the table as part of this group of four.

"...Somehow I get the feeling that this meal is more sumptuous than usual? Could it be that you're putting in special effort just because these two came?"

"It's not like I put in special effort. Although hotpot gives a suitable sense of luxury and filled stomachs, in actual fact, it's not difficult to prepare at all and quite an efficient way of cooking. It also makes full use of leftover vegetables. By the way, you girls should really eat your vegetables."

Ignoring Rushella's pouting, he began enjoying the meal with everyone else.

Hisui busied himself with replenishing ingredients and soup in the hotpot. In order to maintain the soup's sense of freshness, he used a filter to pick up froth and excess oil in the soup. Diligently, he added new chicken, meatballs as well as various vegetables.

"Hi-kun, you're really pro at this. I'd gladly take you as my bride right now❤"

"That's not something you say to guys."

"Oh my, but I'm really serious, you know? I could eat you up right here❤"

Saying that, Mei licked her luscious moistened lips.

Hisui knew very well she was not joking and silently averted his gaze. Perhaps just as Rushella had said, letting her into the house was not a wise decision.

"Hmm... Well, the taste is not bad. You really did put in extra effort today, right?"

Although Rushella was satisfied with the taste, she was still not in a particularly good mood, with clear displeasure on her face as she spoke.

"I already said I didn't. Like always, I took lazy shortcuts. Besides, hotpot as a choice in and of itself is already laziness in a way."

"Liar! Then how could it be so tasty!?"

"I'm not lying. If you had to say something was different, it's because of the act of having hotpot itself."

"......?"

"Or maybe because we have a whole group here for company."

"What does that have to do with taste?"

"That's what hotpot is like as a type of cooking."

Hisui took the plate Rushella extended and served her various foods in balanced proportions. Naturally, he also placed a fair amount of vegetables that Rushella had been avoiding.

"What are you doing! Don't give me whatever you chose randomly!"

"Like I said, eat more vegetables. And stop breaking up the silken tofu into little pieces. If you're unable to pick it up with your chopsticks, just use a strainer."

Hisui lectured as he added a fair amount of tofu to her plate.

"...Because it's very difficult...... It's all this tool's fault!"

Despite complaining verbally, Rushella continued to shove into her mouth the tofu that Hisui had served her.

Even Eruru, who had not said a single word, was working away at the food with her chopsticks nonstop. Apparently tonight's cooking was rather suited to her tastes.

"But you... Never made hotpot for me before. Why today?"

Rushella's question made Hisui's expression darken.

"...Eating hotpot with just two people, would be a bit much."

"What do you mean by that!? You have something against eating with me!?"

"Hotpot reminds me of memories I don't want to recall..."

Hisui stated indifferently and stood up.

"It's about time to round up the hotpot meal with some porridge."

Saying that, he entered the kitchen to get the ingredients.

Watching his back as he left, Rushella imagined the boy's life at the dinner table before he met her.

Probably -- it was not too different from his life nowadays together with her.

Two people -- having a meal facing each other.

With whom?

With family.

With a vampire.

But later on, he became alone.

And which type of cooking would bring out this heartbreaking sense of loneliness?

Definitely, cooking that required two or more participants to enjoy.

For example... Hotpot.

Even with a new member of the household, even with Rushella joining his dinner table -- was Hisui's loneliness still unable to be dispelled?

"......What a cowardly weakling."

Rushella grumbled with displeasure, sweeping the rest of the food in the hotpot onto her plate.

Then they finished the porridge and Hisui dutifully cleared the table and began washing the dishes and tableware.

Just as he was washing in the kitchen, Eruru suddenly came near him.

"Let me help. Accepting someone's hospitality without doing anything in return does not suit my style."

"Thanks... Although I'd like to thank you sincerely for your offer, what is up with that complaining expression on your face?"

"I have no complaints about your cooking. However, I wish to start on my true purpose for coming to this place."

"I got it. Let me finish the stuff on hand first."

"That is why I am helping. Get it done quickly."

As Eruru hastened verbally, she was also very efficient in action. In short time, all the tableware was washed and she was finally able to cut to the main purpose and begin her work.

"...Then let's go. To the basement."

Hisui led her through the living room.

And ended up being caught by Rushella, observant as ever.

"Where are you two going!?"

"Oh my, it's you two together again. Aren't you teaming up quite frequently lately?"

Mei also joined in, questioning Hisui as she rested her chin on her hands. Hisui could not be bothered to answer her.

"This is work, I repeat, work. I don't know how long she'll take, but I'm coming back immediately. You two should take a bath first."

"Got it. I'll be waiting on your bed, please hurry?"

"...Sleep on the living room sofa tonight, okay?"

Hisui grumbled in response to Mei's tempting seductions, then led Eruru to the basement.

As they descended the staircase, the lighting switched from light bulbs to old fashioned candle stands. With great interest, Eruru surveyed her surroundings.

"This style and atmosphere is pretty effective. I finally get a slight sense that I am visiting a vampire's castle."

"That's all in the past. This is now the home of a human, me."

"Is there not a vampire living here currently? Has she been down here?"

"Are there any vampires in this world who would willingly go to a place where there's a giant cross stuck in the ground? She was curious originally, but once I told her, she avoided this place."

"......"

Hisui's explanation made Eruru's expression awkward. After all, she was afraid of crosses too.

"Don't worry, I moved it somewhere else today."

"...Thank you."

"We're there."

Hisui stopped and pointed somewhere close ahead.

Illuminated by candlelight, one could see a library filled with innumerable bookshelves.

Scattered over the floor were books that could not fit in the filled shelves, clearly displaying their massive numbers and ancient history.

The library's collection of books was quite varied and in depth, with virtually all them in foreign languages, clearly exhibiting the former owner's vast knowledge.

"This is..."

"I guess it counts as the inheritance left behind by my foster parent. She really loved books and would sometimes shut herself down here to read. So, what you're looking for should be over there?"

Hisui walked over to a certain corner in the library and asked Eruru as he pointed to the vast book collection.

"Probably somewhere here... Books about witches."

Eruru carefully browsed the titles on the books' spines, searching for the keyword "witch." Even given her foreign language abilities, she could only read half of them, but she soon found a book related to witches.

"A vampire collecting books on witches...? What purpose did she have?"

"In my view, purely out of interest? Besides, she experienced "witch hunts" personally herself. She mentioned that she was almost mistaken for a witch once."

"I have heard of traditions which regard vampires and witches as the same, could it be possible it stems from your foster parent?"

"This vexes me but I have no way of refuting that possibility... Well, just research as much as you want. If necessary, you can even borrow and take them away."

"Then I shall respectfully accept your offer."

Eruru sat down on the ground and began to browse through a book she casually grabbed.

This was going to be a rather arduous task, but there was no hesitation in her eyes.

"...Don't overwork yourself, okay?"

"I do not need you to worry over me."

Hearing Eruru's cold response, Hisui forced a smile and left the basement.

While Hisui went underground, Rushella went to take a bath -- Mei took this opportunity to go to the second floor.

She had no interest in Eruru's work in the first place.

Of course when her help was needed, she was still going to fulfill her duties in deference to her salary -- but the whole reason she came to Hisui's house today was purely personal business.

That's right -- everything was for her childbearing plan.

"At his house on a holiday -- this inevitable day has finally arrived......"

Mei smiled malevolently and began to explore the second floor.

She had already confirmed this floor was the location of Hisui's bedroom.

As the main battlefield where her ecstatic baby making battle will take place, it was quite necessary to ascertain the physical location beforehand.

"Hmm...... Could it be this one?"

Mei opened the first sliding door. The handle's style was rather luxurious and old fashioned. Entering the room, the sight was even more astonishing.

"Wow......"

It rivaled the palaces where royalty and nobility resided.

An extra large canopy bed. Priceless antiques and art work were everywhere. The bed was covered with a beautiful red velvet blanket which looked extremely soft. From the wallpaper down to the smallest articles, everything was chosen carefully in aesthetics.

The room was large enough to take up most of the second floor, but no matter how you looked at it, it did not seem to be Hisui's room.

Rather, all the designs in view were quite feminine.

However, the place lacked mirrors and a dressing table, essential elements of a girl's room, giving one a very unnatural feeling. But as soon as she saw the jet black coffin placed beside the bed, Mei instantly understood.

"This is..."

Definitely a vampire's room.

Which was why there were no mirrors. Because mirrors would not show the reflection of the master, they were meaningless.

A vampire's characteristic -- no reflection in the mirror. Also, there was the fear of sunlight. Hence the room's curtains were made of thick fabric for blocking light.

"A wrong guess eh?"

Mei prepared to leave in disappointment but unfortunately ran into Rushella just as she was returning to her room after her bath. Naturally, she was wearing just a shirt as per her usual casual attire.

"What are you doing in my room!?"

"Nothing. But your room surely costs a fortune. Could Hi-kun's finances be quite stretched?"

"This room was originally like this! Thanks to that, I am currently very satisfied."

Clearly pleased with the room, Rushella crossed her arms as she nodded.

On the other hand, Mei looked up at the ceiling with a serious expression.

"What is it, is there a problem?"

"If that is what you say... Then Hi-kun has always kept the room in its original condition? Even after that vampire died."

"......!"

Hearing that, Rushella was shocked and rooted to the spot.

Indeed... That was true.

Thinking back, all the furniture was free of dust and the room was very clean when she moved in here.

All this time, Hisui must have been -- cleaning regularly.

"This looks bad......"

"What do you mean by that......?"

"Have you heard of Hikaru Genji?"[1]

"I learned about him in class. It's that guy who tried to pursue his stepmother in addition to various women at the same time. He even went as far as to kidnap a young girl to raise according to his preferences, that really despicable man, right!?"

"...Well, yes, even though parts of the content is undeniable... Nevertheless it is still a world-famous classic of Japanese literature. Furthermore, doesn't this tale contain a hidden truth that is applicable now?"

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean is, men are unable to free themselves from the shadow of their mother. Shouldn't you understand that better than me?"

Mei stared at Rushella as if she has discerned something.

Rushella simply turned her face away and grumbled impatiently.

"...Don't know."

"...Really? Even if Hisui-kun is uninterested in you as a Lady Fujitsubo, what about the other one? Perhaps he is planning on nurturing his own Murasaki, who knows?"[2]

"What on earth are you trying to say...?"

"Would a vampire raise a human child for no reason at all? What would you have done if you were in her place?"

"......"

"Normally, this situation is impossible. However, for an immortal vampire with eternal youth, waiting for a decade or two is nothing, right? Perhaps -- she was simply waiting."

"Waiting for what?"

Rushella asked softly. She did not want to ask, but she had to know -- such were the emotions carried in her voice.

"Waiting for Hi-kun to be raised into a man of her liking. Then suck his blood and easily convert him into a fellow member of her race. Furthermore, Hi-kun most likely cannot be unaware of her intentions... But even after realizing it, he still stayed with her, so that means, Hi-kun also..."

Saying that, Mei glanced sideways suggestively at Rushella.

Rushella simply stood there with her fists clenched tight.

Mei did not provoke her any further and turned back to her original goal.

"Since this is your room... Could Hi-kun's room be over there!?"

"Ah, wait a minute, you...!"

Before Rushella could stop her, Mei intruded into Hisui's room.

This was a very ordinary western style bedroom. Its area was also standard for a high school student, with nothing special about it.

A desk and a steel bookcase. Manga and CDs scattered on the floor along with clothes. No matter how you looked at it, this was a very ordinary high school student's room.

"Hmm... Nothing out of ordinary at a cursory glance."

"I am asking you, what are you thinking!? Why have you come to that guy's room!?"

"Just scouting. In order for baby making to be successful, I need to get a complete grasp of his preferences. Isn't this common sense?"

"I-I don't know!"

The term "baby making" clearly made Rushella's face blush.

Mei went "hmph," threw Rushella a glance and continued exploring the room.

"I really have to reach a deeper understanding of Hi-kun... I must look here!"

Mei dived beneath the bed as if performing a baserunner's slide.

Rushella followed.

"Hey, why are you following me!?"

"Shut up, this is my freedom! Be quick with it, what have you found here?"

"Oh come on, you didn't know? When it comes to under the bed, this is a man's private space... Sexual dispositions and that sort of stuff will be completely revealed! Well, in short, this is a treasure trove of the worst kind of publications."

"What do you mean by 'wurst kind of publications'!?"

"...You really want me to explain right here?"

"You're talking about that, those whatever 'dourinshi,' very thin booklets, right?"

"You're only half right. After all, they can be targeted towards all age groups, you should stop with that strange sense of prejudice. Anyway, this is off topic, let's hurry and check out Hi-kun's tastes...!"

Mei reached out towards the depths of the dark underbed.

Perhaps driven by a sense of defiant opposition, Rushella joined into the fray.

"What are you doing, searching around as well!?"

"Shut up, understanding the servant is my duty!"

Under the bed, their skirmish reached a stalemate.

These frail-looking girls wrestled together, fighting over the treasure known as the worst kind of publications.

Nevertheless, their efforts ended fruitlessly.

More accurately, nothing was hidden beneath Hisui's bed.

"...Nothing here? Or it's hidden in a more intricate location!?"

"Hmph, that's all a person of your level can do after all! I, on the other hand, was able to find something, see?"

Rushella smiled victoriously and crawled out from under the bed, holding her spoils up in the air.

"What is that?"

Rushella's hand held neither the worst kind of publication nor one of those thin booklets -- instead, it was a bottle that could fit in one's palm. The bottle was sealed with a quaint-looking cork and the contents were rather ordinary looking -- ash.

"So, what could this be?"

"I'm the one who asked first, don't you go asking me back!"

"But even if you say that..."

The two beauties began to ponder together.

At this very moment, the master of the room stood at the door, completely astonished.

Having finished his task as Eruru's guide, he had left the basement to return to his room.

"...What are you two doing in other people's room?"

" "......" "

The two girls hung their heads in shame.

What have they done, after all?

The awkward atmosphere hanging over the trio persisted for a moment, until Hisui noticed the bottle in Rushella's hand and broke the silence.

"Give that back..."

Hisui walked over to Rushella, trying to take back the bottle.

In the face of Hisui's forceful demeanor, even Rushella obeyed quietly without resistance.

Hisui ignored the shocked vampire and simply placed the bottle into his pocket.

"Don't hang around in a room that's not yours. If you don't have any other business, then hurry and get out."

Hisui declared gruffly. In response, Rushella resumed her usual airs and objected.

"How dare you speak in such a manner!? Also, what on earth was that!?"

"Ah, perhaps it's sand from a beach they visited together in the past?"

Mei tried to calm the situation and suggested half-jokingly.

However, Hisui refuted with an icy-cold expression.

"...This counts as ashes of the dead, I suppose? Using a human term."

This statement made Rushella and Mei look at each other awkwardly.

They both knew his past. More accurately, they knew roughly what happened, because Hisui himself seldom talked about his experiences.

But they both knew that the vampire who raised Hisui was already destroyed.

As for a vampire's demise, both understood very well.

It was complete and utter destruction.

A body once blessed with eternal vigor, transformed into dust, scattered to oblivion, finally leaving nothing behind.

"I was only able to gather... This much."

Yes.

In the end, all that was left in the palm of his hand, was this much.

In that moment, the merciless wind had robbed him of her remains, taking them to oblivion.

"How utterly inane."

These merciless words made Hisui's entire body shudder. Mei too, turned to face Rushella with a shocked expression.

"For someone already destroyed, what meaning is there in her remains? You... How much longer are you going to let yourself be fettered like this?"

"...Nothing like that. This simply counts as familial attachment or should I say, a ritual... Nothing more."

"My room... You've always kept it in the same condition as when that woman was alive, right? You must have been cleaning it all this time. You're utterly worthless, you know?"

Rushella continued to scold.

Mei motioned with her eyes to tell Rushella to stop, but she was completely oblivious.

"Those furniture and that bed... I'm going to throw them all out and buy new ones. Why do I have to use second hand goods from someone else!?"

Rushella continued with her arrogant rhetoric.

But her gaze towards Hisui carried pity in her eyes.

Having turned around, Hisui did not notice her gaze and simply answered indifferently.

"Do with them as you wish."

"......!?"

"If you want to change them, then go ahead and buy new ones. To be honest, I'm getting tired of them too."

"......"

"But you'll have to pay for them yourself. Also, you have to handle getting rid of the old furniture. Ah, why don't you simply sell them to recover part of the cost, it should save quite a bit."

Then there was heavy silence.

Without saying anything, Mei's gaze began to wander.

Finally, Rushella spoke up.

"Are you joking? If money is squandered recklessly, there's no way to survive in the human world."

"Really......"

Hisui said indifferently and left the room.

The two girls did not follow.

Hisui returned to the empty living room and sat on the sofa, watching television for a while. Then he took out the bottle from his pocket.

Eruru mentioned before that he was carrying two articles when he returned from abroad -- this was the second piece.

Treasuring it by his side at all times, recollecting sad memories from time to time -- was not something that he did.

Hisui simply collected the ash, poured it into a bottle, took it home, and kept it under the bed -- simply that.

Perhaps he would never have looked at it again.

Just as Rushella said, he was utterly worthless.

Clearly this was only ash rather than Miraluka herself.

Hisui dispelled his melancholy and stood up.

Agonizing over the past was not going to change anything. Hence, Hisui decided to take a bath first, wash his hair, and refresh himself. He was also a little concerned about Eruru who was still downstairs.

Hisui walked to the bathroom and took off his clothes in front of the door.

Rushella and Mei were probably still on the second floor. He could not hear anything from them.

Eruru was working hard in the basement.

Encountering someone just as he was taking off his clothes -- should not happen.

The bathroom's sliding door was open and the lights were off. Calling out, he confirmed there was no one inside.

Everything was OK -- in theory.

Up until the point when he sat down on the bathing stool, there were no problems.

But as soon as he sat down, he heard a sound from behind and something jumped down from the ceiling.

"...Huh?"

Hisui was going to turn around to check out what happened, but the soft sensation of something pressing on his back made him froze.

Then a supple arm extended forward from behind, embracing him by the waist.

Additionally -- sweet breath was blowing by his ear.

"Excuse me~~ Sudou-san?"

"Oh my, you realized it was me just from the feeling of my embrace?"

"Only you would do such a thing! Where did you pop out from...!?"

"I was pressed against the corner of the ceiling all along. Using only static friction and muscle power, I kept myself against the wall, so tiring❤"

"What is with that terrifying power and persistence of yours!? Surely you must be using your artificial strength in all the wrong places!?"

In the past, Frankenstein's creature, born in a cold and sterile laboratory, out of hatred, had charged into his creator's life with ferocity that would put modern stalkers to shame -- now in different time and place, the creatures' persistence seemed to have been redirected towards procreation instead.

Here in this bathroom, both of them were completely naked.

"I've been waiting, waiting for this very moment when Hi-kun would take your clothes off yourself...! Finally, accept your fate!!"

"This must have been your goal from the beginning... Could it be possible, the witch was by my side all along!?"

"Hi-kun is so silly... All women are witches, you know?"

Saying that, Mei pressed her body even tighter against him.

Hisui could feel those exceedingly bouncy and heavy fruit against his back.

Mobilizing all the nerves in his body to cut off the sensations from his back, he banished that devilish warmth from his mind.

It is empty.

There is nothing on his back.

Hence, there was nothing pressing against him.

"Ah, stop it, Hi-kun, stop moving....... You're rubbing against the tips, can you feel that......"

"What are you talking about, Sudou-san... I can't feel anything, you know? It must be my imagination, but I seem to be feeling a little bit of softness and warmth on my back, that must be something like meat buns, right? There seems to be something slightly hard on the tips, it must be that, the peas on the top of shumai, right? Definitely, it can't be that thing that babies suck on, right!?"

"...Well aren't you fully aware. Hey, ignoring me like this...... That's so unfair."

Mei's hand of the devil reached between Hisui's legs. With his entire body bare except for the towel covering that location, Hisui barely managed to maintain his last line of defense.

Mei's beautifully slender and pale hand was caressing Hisui's hand which desperately kept the towel in position.

"Seriously... You're desperately holding back. Hi-kun, let your blood fill up this location... And turn into your Anti-Drac mode, how's that.....?"

"Stop using my body's constitution to make dirty jokes...... This little guy here is just as shy as his master, me! Faced with such a sudden situation, he doesn't know how to react!"

With Mei's other arm firmly wrapped around his waist, Hisui could not escape even if he tried. An artificial human's arm strength was completely different from what that devilish supple skin would suggest. Were he to offer the slightest resistance, very likely, he would instantly lose two or three ribs.

"Hey... It's about time you give up on resisting, right?"

"Stop it... Don't blow in my ear! Ah, ahhh, s-stop it...... Don't bite my earlobe..."

Already holding his earlobe in her mouth, she went on to bite lightly.

Mei's lips and tongue deftly played with his earlobe, gradually exiling Hisui's consciousness.

"I've said this before, I am the blowup doll equipped with forty-eight different modes of pleasure...... Faced with my devilish light biting, your consciousness will fly away to the ends of the sky soon."

"I've said this too, that statement you just made is an insult to your artificial human ancestors......"

Hisui's voice of protest was already extremely weak.

Feeling victory was at hand, Mei began to take more intense action.

Slipping the soap through her cleavage, she generated a large amount of soap suds.

Then she used her breasts, covered with soapy bubbles, to rub against Hisui's back.

"As I thought, bathroom play has to be done like this❤ These superb skills of mine, far surpassing those of soapland massage ladies, enjoy them well❤"

"......--!!"

This was probably another one of her forty-eight modes of pleasure. Indeed, it felt extremely nice. Unbearably pleasurable.

While soap suds and breasts were performing a symphony of ecstasy, two protrusions rubbed against him from time to time, playing a low note, feeling like flashes of lightning that streaked across Hisui's back.

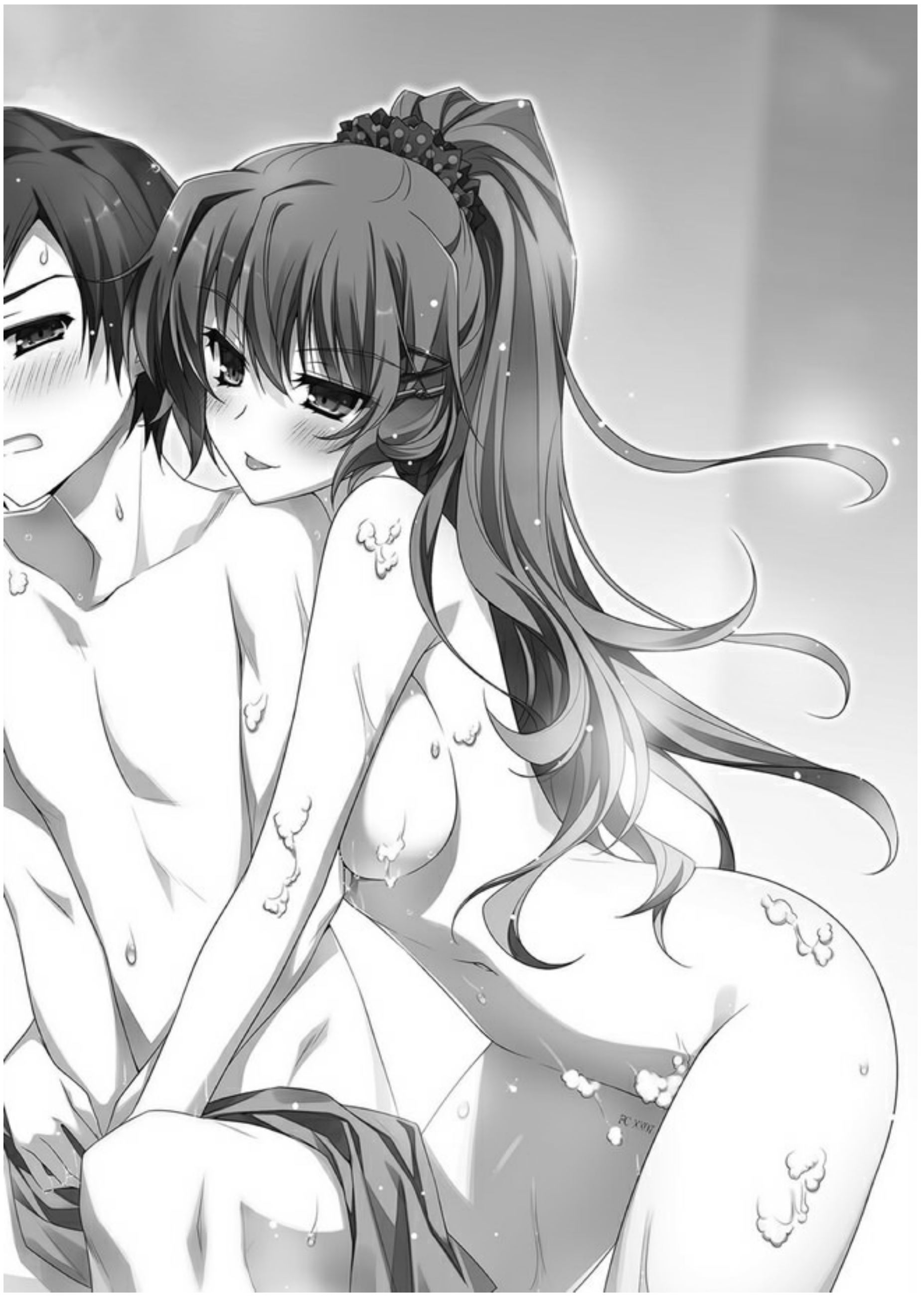
No good.

No good, no good, no good, no good, no good, no good, no good, no good, extra super no good!

Using the last of his sanity, Hisui reached out towards the sink. Turning the tap to its fullest, he filled it.

Then he splashed all the water towards Mei's face behind him.

"Ah, so cold!"



Surprised by the sudden attack, Mei finally let go of Hisui.

Taking advantage of the opening, Hisui slid the bathroom door open and attempted to escape.

However, Mei hugged his waist from behind, dragging Hisui along the ground. Only his upper torso made it out the door, but there was no escape.

"Wait up, Hi-kun... Are you trying to disgrace a girl!?"

"Why don't you consider my shame first! Hey, someone, hurry and save me~~!!"

Hisui abandoned his pride and cried for help directly. To his surprise, his reinforcements ended up arriving quite quickly.

Then Hisui immediately regretted his rash decision.

"What!? Did the witch chase us to your home!?"

"What happened!? I was just coming up for a brief break, and now there is a situation!?"

Rushella and Eruru opened the door to the changing area and rushed inside.

The heroic saviors arriving in haste were frozen by the sight of naked Hisui sprawled over the the floor at the bathroom entrance.

Fortunately, his lower torso was still inside the bathroom, so they did not see everything -- but the two girls immediately realized it was Mei inside tugging Hisui.

"Ah, excuse me, my two heroes, allow me to explain......"

"Hi-kun asked me to help wash his back, that is why I......"

Mei suddenly acted rather docile and awkwardly twiddled her fingers.

Hisui instantly went pale as he listened.

"I already said I was embarrassed, but he insisted......!"

"Eh----!? What a liar! As if anyone would believe you......"

They believed.

Without changing expressions, Rushella took out her favorite short sword and entered a stance. Eruru took out her anti-vampire sacred gun, "Argentum," and undid the safety.

"Hey, wait a sec, isn't this too strange!? It's my virginity that's at risk here! Can't you two understand, this kind of situation!? Hey, why aren't you talking!? Why are you so expressionless!? Calm down, stop, don't, stop now ---- !!"

Before the bathwater had cooled, Mei already left the scene alone.

After that, in the bath tub that was large enough to hold two or three people, floated the body of a boy who resembled a drowned corpse. It was Hisui, completely beaten up with his face entirely bruised.

The blood from his wounds dyed the bathwater red, highlighting the tragic ending.

Kujou Hisui, in accordance to his name,[3] was submerged in water dyed scarlet by the bathwater additive known as fresh blood.

Late at night.

Rushella and Mei having gone to bed, Eruru continued to read alone in the basement.

Thanks to her half heritage of vampire blood, there was no exhaustion showing on her face. Using illumination from old fashioned candlelight, she perused ancient books without pause.

Having lost count of the number of books she had already read, Eruru closed another one and placed it on the floor.

Hearing footsteps approaching, clear displeasure appeared on her face.

"What business do you have, Kujou-san who not only tricks girls to enter his house, but even commands them to enter the bathroom?"

"What is with that tone of voice? Perhaps just as Rushella said, I shouldn't have brought you two to my home. I'm still hurting all over from those wounds."

Almost turned unfairly into a drowned ghost, Hisui grumbled as he exercised his shoulder.

He almost expected himself to die.

"It is already late, how about you go to sleep? Go and share Sudou-san's bed."

"Who do you think I am... Are you trying to send little Red Riding Hood to the hungry wolf's nest?"

"Then it would be best if you were eaten by a wolf. Fine, why are you here?"

"Only to see how you're doing here. Also, this is for you."

Hisui put forward a tray with a plate and a coffee cup. The plate was holding a seaweed sandwich while the coffee cup contained hot milk with sugar added.

"This is your midnight snack. Don't stay up too late, okay?"

"Just like the one who lives in your house, I am more energetic at night. But anyway... Thanks."

Eruru took the tray and returned to the books.

But since Hisui had prepared her a snack which could be eaten while she worked, Eruru held the sandwich in one hand in response to his unspoken offer of care.

"So -- any results so far?"

"...Nothing much at this point. Even though the resources here are great, ultimately most accounts of witches are written by third party researchers. Considering Europe's literacy rate at the time these were written, as well as the secretive ways of witches, this cannot be helped..."

"I see......"

His hopes dashed, Hisui slumped his shoulders in disappointment.

As expected, the power of witches were passed from mother to daughter, from master to disciple. Secret rituals which were never divulged to outsiders.

"However, there are many interesting records here. For example, the countering of the "mystic eyes" as part of anti-vampire strategies. Apparently, this simply summarizes the findings through repeated trials and failures. For example, one could set up a barrier to hide behind and avoid the effects. However, the spellcaster is rendered immobile, hence it lacks practicality. However, even if one wore a talisman, there would not be much use. In order to counter the "mystic eyes," a more direct method of resistance is required -- that is what this says."

"Not yet succeeded? But these records were written centuries ago, perhaps it could have been realized already by now? What about the others?"

"Other information worthy of reference include various records on the drugs and potions concocted by witches. Although the effects of these drugs vary greatly, making them odorless and tasteless seems to be impossible. Even if mixed into food or drink, much work needs to be done in regards to the taste, otherwise the target would notice instantly. If the drug's originates from a herb, then the other ingredients must match. Ideally, those whose taste would not be ruined by the herb's essential oils."

"I see. So if you want someone to eat a witch's poisoned apple, make it into an apple pie... Something like that?"

"Basically. A drug's effectiveness is inversely proportional to its concentration. If it is not a particularly powerful drug, there is no need to spend too much effort on the cooking."

"But if it's added to plain water, then all sorts of covering up must be done. However, how do 'witches' do it......"

Hisui sat on the floor and began to ponder. Eruru took out one of those plastic bags for police evidence and showed it to him.

Hisui could recognize the object inside the bag.

That was the paper bag he had found in the trash at the home economics preparation room.

"Before coming to your house, this was already analyzed."

"Hmm. So what's the result, found anything?"

"...In actual fact, you already understood what this was from the start, right? You knew what it was and what it is used for."

Eruru stared at Hisui as she asked.

Seeing her determined eyes which say "Do not dare fool me," Hisui had no choice but to speak seriously.

"Most likely... Seasoning herbs?"

Seasoning herbs -- in short, a mixture of various herbs for cooking.

Used for eliminating unpleasant odors from fish and meat, to make dishes more savory, they were often used in Europe and could be considered a type of spice.

Combinations of herbs varied from dish to dish. The required herbs were tied up with a string, placed in soup to boil together with the meat.

These were sold at the market, and one could find many simple seasoning herbs at the supermarket sealed in paper bags.

"After all, my foster parent came from Europe, so I've seen her used them in her usual cooking. Last time, the cooking practical was making thick soup, so using seasoning herbs should be perfectly reasonable, right?"

"At least my group did not use them. Probably none of the other groups as well... What about yours? Since you tried it, you should know, right?"

"......"

That's right -- the taste of the thick soup then, was still vivid in his memory.

For the level of a school cooking practical, it was too amazing.

Recalling it now, much effort must have been put into the seasoning. There had seemed to be a faint taste of herbs. In any case, the thing in Eruru's hand was definitely used by Hisui's group.

"Even if it were used... So what? You can buy it at the market, and there's no problem there. Boiling it in the soup, then throwing it out afterwards. Perfectly natural, right?"

"Then who was the one who used it? Excluding the great Rushella Dahm Draculea who did not participate seriously in cooking, was it you? Or Sudou-san?"

Eruru's acute interrogation caused Hisui to start doubting.

Naturally, he knew who used it.

He knew who was responsible for the pot and who's duties included the overall seasoning.

All were performed by Sera Reina.

"...It's the Class Rep who used it. So what? She was only trying to make the cooking tastier, and added an additional step, right?"

"According to the results of the analysis, other than ordinary herbs, mandrake 'leaves' were also detected."

"......!?"

Hisui stared wide in surprise.

Why!?

Why would Reina have that kind of poisonous flower...!?

"What on earth is going on...?"

"I do not know. Only that, according to legend, the mandrake's 'leaves' have no medicinal properties. And in actual fact, neither you nor Sudou-san were affected at all. In the first place, this should not affect vampires--"

Regarding this point, Eruru seemed to lack a hypothesis for now. Puzzled, she shook her head.

However, the confirmed truth lay before their eyes.

"But, how could the mandrake's 'leaves' be obtained... Hey, could it be that thing from yesterday?"

"Apparently. After that, I took the flower you uprooted and found evidence of several leaves having been pulled out. Having no use for the flower, someone grafted it as an experiment in the flowerbed -- probably that was what happened? But then again, if medicinal properties were her goal, she should at least have taken the 'flower' back as well..."

As Eruru made her deductions, Hisui could not dispel the doubt in his mind.

Why would Reina...?

Not too long ago, she had been turned into a vampire's sacrifice. She should be an innocent and pure girl.

Reportedly, both her parents were devout Christians and she herself came from a Catholic school.

The quiet and gentle girl who should be the furthest possible from "witches," why would she?

"I understand your refusal to accept the truth, but this is solid fact. I have tested many things, but at the very least, she was the one who added mandrake leaves into the cooking -- this is unmistakable."

"...And so? Are you saying the class rep is the witch? Anyway, what about the herbal tea and scented candles you collected from the vice-president?"

"Of course they were analyzed. In terms of components, nothing unusual. I also brewed the herbal tea and drank it, the taste is quite good, very normal. I am also testing the scented candles right now -- apparently there is no problem."

Saying that, Eruru pointed to the candle stand on the wall.

Now that she mentioned it, Hisui did notice a faint fragrance in the air.

"...Hey, don't be so reckless. What would you do if there were a problem? Have you heard of that Sherlock Holmes short story called 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot'? In order to test a poison, Holmes really suffered greatly."

"It was already analyzed beforehand. Besides, there is no problem with me drinking the stuff. Whether poisons targeting humans or vampires -- neither are effective against a halfbreed like me."

"Don't put it that way."

Hisui's words caused a shred of gloom to flash across Eruru's face.

The cursed blood coursing through her veins was what she hated most of all.

"...After all, it is the truth. It cannot be denied."

"......"

"After investigating, apparently the vice-president is essentially the only student who frequents the home economics preparation room. But the stuff she brought was fine. The only one left we should investigate is Horie-sensei who was supervising the cooking."

"Our group included, she was checking up on everyone's cooking process, and tried a little bit from each in the name of taste testing. Perhaps she could have done something then."

More importantly, she used to be a member of that Occult Research Club.

The name written on the back page was deeply engraved in Hisui and

Eruru's memories.

"Regarding her case, investigations will take place after the holidays. In any case, checking out these resources is the first priority right now."

"Got it. So... Is there any way I can help?"

Hisui expected her to reply "No" or "Please leave and stop getting in my way" but Eruru did not refuse his assistance. Instead, she handed the emptied coffee cup over.

"...Another cup, please."

"Yes~"

Hisui smiled in return, taking the cup and leaving the basement.

Translator's Notes and References:

1. Hikaru Genji(光源氏): the protagonist of the classic Japanese novel The Tale of Genji. Losing his mother in early childhood, he went on to develop romantic relations with numerous women, one of them being his stepmother, Lady Fujitsubo, who greatly resembled his mother and became his womanly ideal. Later on, Hikaru would encounter his stepmother's niece, Murasaki, whom he brought home to raise and educate to become the ideal woman of his dreams.[1]

2. As described in the previous note, Lady Fujitsubo is the stepmother while Murasaki is the stepmother's niece in the Tale of Genji.

3. Kujou Hisui(紅城緋水): for the kanji in his name, both ku(紅) and

hi(緋) mean the color red/scarlet, while 水 means water.

Chapter 5 - This Blood of Mine

Early morning.

Just when everyone else was asleep, a certain girl got up by herself.

With light movements, not making a single sound, she went through the corridor and up the stairs -- towards Hisui's room.

She had only one goal -- baby making.

Sudou Mei was back with a vengeance!

Learning from her mistakes in the bathroom, she was determined to have her way with him this time.

"Hmph, this time I will seduce Hi-kun out of his mind with this victory outfit for sure❤"

Dressed in an appealing pastel colored nightgown, Mei smiled seductively.

In addition to an erotic design which made use of minimal fabric, the sheerness of her lingerie offered fleeting glimpses of what lay beneath.

Sleeping under the same roof on this day, it was a perfect opportunity to realize her long-cherished wish.

Quietly, quietly, she approached Hisui's room and gripped the door handle.

The door was not locked.

Naturally, even if it were locked, an artificial human's arm strength could easily destroy it. But since it would be best not to make unnecessary noise, how fortunate.

Mei tiptoed and slowly pushed open the door to enter the bedroom.

In order not to alarm her target, she did not switch on the lights, instead relying on the naked eye to check out the situation in the room. Although not to a vampire's level, her night vision was still far superior to ordinary humans.

Activating her excellent vision, the artificial human swept her gaze towards the bed -- the bulging blanket.

The target was sleeping on the bed.

Mei cautiously approached the bed side -- and flung away the blanket all at once!

"Hi~kun❤"

The ravenous wolf pounced and pressed herself against Hisui.

Perhaps too deep in sleep, the defenseless lamb did not wake up.

In that case, he will be conquered in his sleep!

Extending her left hand towards the chest while her right hand -- gradually slid its way towards the region between the legs.

This was currently the time of the day when young males were unable to control the lower half of their body.

No matter how hard they tried to suppress, surely there will be a reaction!

Surely there will be a reaction! ...But in actual fact, the feeling from Mei's right hand was not a scorching rod towering towards the heavens but a soft patch of grassland.

As for the left hand which was expecting the touch of a spectacularly white chest -- it found a massive bulging mountain instead. This seemingly familiar sensation of softness and elasticity was a far cry from a muscular chest.

"Eh?"

Something was not right.

Mei applied pressure to her left hand to confirm the situation. She also poked with her right hand just for good measure.

"Ah... Nnn..."

A seductive moan -- or rather, breathing noises from sleep would be more accurate.

This too was a familiar voice.

--It can't be.

Mei focused her gaze to confirm the body lying beneath her. The outline of the one lying in the bed gradually entered the artificial human's view.

A slender figure with a massive voluptuous bust.

As well as long slender legs of great beauty.

Together with bright red lips that surpassed the redness of blood and high-class elegant beauty, the sight was impossible to forget.

Finally, the otherworldly body was clad in a thin shirt.

"Why--!?"

The one sleeping in the bed was Rushella.

Molested at Mei's hands just now, the sleeping beauty woke up.

Slowly, she opened her eyes.

Having just woken up, her gaze was wandering unsteadily.

Just as Rushella slowly realized who was lying on top of her and where this person's hands were touching -- She screamed.

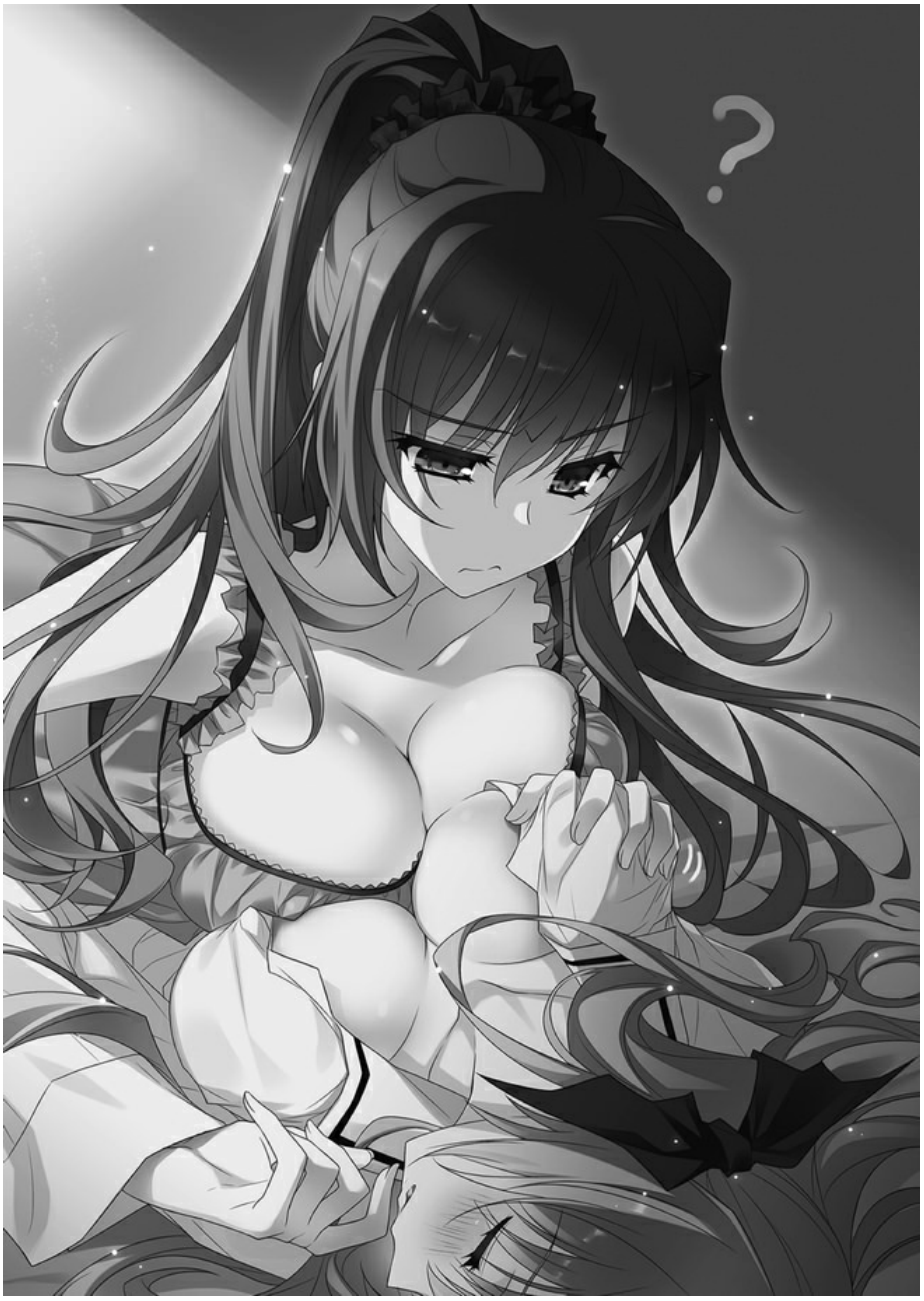
"Yah----!!"

"Hey, keep it down! It's early morning, be quiet!!"

"Y-You, what on earth are you doing!? Could it be, you want to... me!?"

Rushella pushed Mei away and curled herself into a ball.

This reaction was only natural.



"...Of course not! I came to give Hi-kun a night assault! But why are you sleeping here?!"

"I woke up too early today so I came over intending to get a drink of blood. But that guy isn't in the room! While tossing and turning on the bed, waiting for him to return, I..."

"...You fell asleep yourself. When the lover is absent, you revel in the warmth lingering in his bed... Hey, how much do you really like Hi-kun!?"

"Shut up, that guy is my servant. Liking him is only natural! You are not allowed to prey upon him!"

"Why must I listen to your orders!? Also, where's Hi-kun!?"

"How would I know!?"

The verbal battle between the vampire and Frankenstein's creature began at dawn.

The drums of war were beating in Hisui's room to signal an all-star showdown with great Hollywood potential.

"Besides, what is with the shameless way you are dressed!? Exposing your underwear for others to see, totally shameless!"

"Yeah right, like I'd want to hear that from the girl doing the naked shirt look! You must be doing it on purpose!?"

"I wear this because it's comfortable! You're wearing that because you intend to do something to that guy......? Or to me as well..."

Halfway through, Rushella finally realized what was being done to her.

First her breasts had been fondled, then her most important private part was--

"Bitch--!!"

Blushing, she picked up Hisui's pillow and smashed it against Mei's face.

Struck squarely, Mei threw it back angrily.

"You really want a fight...... You lustful vampire!"

"Shut up, lecherous Frankenstein!"

As their dispute escalated, killing intent filled the room.

The battle for domination between the strongest supernatural creatures was finally about to erupt.

The aftershock of the impact shook the entire room, or rather, the entire house shook.

"......Hmm?"

The shaking of the ceiling caused Hisui to wake up.

Since the source of the shaking came from above, it was probably not an earthquake, so what the heck was happening upstairs?

Rubbing his sleepy eyes, he noticed several blankets draped over himself.

Hisui had apparently fallen asleep while he was helping Eruru look up information. The blankets covering him must be her doing.

Eruru was also sleeping on the side.

Using the scattered books on the floor as a pillow, she breathed peacefully.

Her pure and innocent appearance did not seem like it belonged to someone of Hisui's age. None of her usual cold attitude could be seen from her face right now.

Lying on the ground, the maiden was neither the important official from the Metropolitan Police Department nor the one shouldering a cursed fate, but an ordinary girl one could find anywhere.

"...Don't force yourself too much."

Hisui gently covered Eruru with a blanket.

Then he started clearing away the surrounding books.

Just at this moment, frantic footsteps could be heard coming down the stairs.

"Ah, you're here!"

Rushella had arrived. Something must have happened for her shirt had been pulled into a mess and she was panting as if exhausted.

"...What happened? By the way, stop making my shirts dirty..."

"Shut up! It's all your fault, because you were not in your room, I......!!"

Rushella hugged herself, speaking with tearful eyes.

Hisui had no idea what was going on, but it seemed like something serious happened.

Just as Hisui tried to make sense of the situation, another visitor came down to the basement.

"So that's where you went, vampire!? We haven't decided a victor yet!"

...Her face looking similarly exhausted, Mei made her appearance in a sexy nightgown, all covered in sweat.

"Eh, what the heck is going on?"

Hisui tried his best to avoid gazing at Mei as he asked. Pouting tearfully, Rushella made accusations.

"This woman was making moves on me while I was asleep...!"

"Eh, you're interested in that too!?"

"Of course not! Lesbians belong to the domain of female vampires, okay!? Besides, why aren't you in your own room, Hi-kun!? You made my plans all go to waste!"[1]

"That's right, you should be obediently sleeping in your room!!"

"Why are you two in firm agreement over this kind of thing even when you're quarreling?"

Hisui could not help but retort. At his moment, Eruru also woke up, rubbing her eyes.

"...What is going on......"

"Don't bother. Just keep sleeping. Ah, but sleeping here is uncomfortable and you're going to catch a cold. Let's go up."

Hisui suggested helpfully.

Still in a sleepy daze, Eruru nodded and agreed.

"Hmph, you're sure being treated well here."

Rushella mocked unhappily and started looking around the basement.

"Hey... Isn't this a wine cellar!? You never allowed me to come here before, could that be the reason?"

"To be frank, yes, that was a contributing factor. Ah, hey, stop messing with things carelessly!"

Rushella ignored him and invaded the wine cellar in the corner of the basement.

"Hmph... What a classy collection. Primarily red wine, excellent taste, I say!"

Alcoholic drinks had to be red wine -- perhaps stemming from a vampire's instincts, even without her past memories, Rushella still insisted on red wine.

Although the wine cellar was quite small, the temperature and humidity were definitely controlled meticulously. With no lack of well-aged highly prized vintages, this was a very well-stocked private collection indeed.

"Yes, this bottle looks great!"

Seeing one particular bottle of wine that stood out and seemed to be particularly treasured and safeguarded, Rushella plucked it out and left the wine cellar.

"What the heck are you doing?! Ah, that one is……!"

As Rushella exited the wine cellar, Hisui noticed the bottle of red wine in her hand.

"Give it back."

A stern expression on his face, Hisui reached out and grabbed the bottle.

"What's the matter? There's so many there, I'm just taking one!"

"This is no drink for a child."

"I am a vampire, you know? How old do you think I am!?"

"No idea, but your mental age is just a brat's. Even if you won't die from acute alcohol poisoning, you will get drunk. Hurry and give it back."

"Shut up!"

Both refusing to back down, they began a battle for the bottle.

Before a victor could be decided, the struggle ended unexpectedly. Slipping out of Rushella's hand, the bottle flew through the air.

"Ah……!"

Before she could catch it, the bottle struck the floor with crisp sound and shattered.

The dark violet liquid splashed across the floorboards, releasing a rich aroma.

Someone with poor alcohol tolerance would probably get tipsy from the mere smell. That was how concentrated and fantastic the wine's fragrance.

A connoisseur of red wine would be able to tell this was definitely a priceless vintage simply from the smell.

Hisui stood rooted to the spot in shock, staring at the wine's demise.

The gloom on his face made Rushella and all the girls fall silent.

Finally, Rushella averted her gaze and broke the silence.

"I-It's your own fault, okay……! Don't blame me, you were the one trying to take it by force…"

Her quiet denial carried an apologetic tone.

"Fine, whatever."

Hisui approached the bottle's remains and dipped a finger into the residual wine at the bottom of the bottle. Then he tasted it lightly.

"...So that's what it tastes like?"

Exclaiming, Hisui began to clear the fragments from the floor.

Watching him from behind, Mei stepped forward apologetically. Definitely, she felt partly responsible for the accident.

"...Let me help you?"

"It's fine. No need."

Hisui was not angry. Rather, he was completely emotionless.

No good.

This was the worst.

"This bottle of wine... Is it something really precious...?"

Mei asked with trepidation as Hisui continued clearing up and replied.

"This vintage is from the year of my birth. The original plan was for us to open and drink it on my twentieth birthday."

" "......!!" "

Rushella and Mei looked at each other.

Who bought the wine and who planned it for commemorating Hisui's twentieth birthday -- the answer was obvious.

The foster parent who raised Hisui and former master of the wine cellar -- that vampire.

"She told me on my tenth birthday that she was really impatient. A vampire's concept of time sure is really different. In the end, she died first instead."

Continuing with his task, Hisui spoke indifferently.

The mood of the three girls standing behind him grew increasingly somber.

Mei and Eruru glared at Rushella with reproach, causing her to feel awkwardly at wit's end.

"...I'll have to get a cloth to wipe this up later. Ah, are there any glass fragments over there? Did you get hurt?"

Hisui finished picking up the glass and asked Eruru.

It was only natural for him to worry about her because she just woke up. But Rushella responded with displeasure.

"...You don't need to worry about her. Even though inferior to me, her wounds heal quite quickly."

"...Don't say stuff like that. Everyone feels pain all the same."

"Why weren't you in your room? Instead, you ran over to this kind of place to spend time with this woman! If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have suffered what happened in the bedroom, and the wine wouldn't have......!"

Rushella glared hatefully at Hisui and continued.

"So you have a preference for this kind of half-breed? Neither human nor vampire, a half-breed species!?"

As soon as she finished speaking, Hisui expressionlessly poked Rushella in the head.

A light poke, nothing out of the ordinary -- but Hisui's face was full of cold and merciless anger.

"What are you doing!?"

"Apologize now."

Hisui pointed at Eruru as he commanded Rushella.

"Shut up!"

Rushella punched Hisui in the chest.

Completely not holding back -- she had used her full strength.

Struck by the impact, Hisui's slender body instantly flew away and smashed into the wall.

Unfortunately, he hit his head.

"Hey what are you doing!?"

"Aren't you going too far!?"

Mei and Eruru's words caused Rushella to return to her senses. Realizing what she had done, she stared at her own fist.

"I-It's all because......!"

Rushella had barely begun to justify herself when Hisui stood up. Apparently his forehead was wounded for blood seeped from a cut, dyeing his pale face red.

His tragic appearance shocked everyone present.

Unsteadily, Hisui walked before Rushella and repeated the same line.

"Apologize now."

Saying that, he fainted and collapsed on the ground.

Mei and Eruru hurried over to his side.

Rushella, on the other hand, trembled all over as she ran out from the basement.

"Are you okay, Hi-kun!?"

"In any case, the bleeding must be stopped first. Help me."

Carrying Hisui to the ground floor, Eruru performed first aid treatment.

Luckily, the wound was not very deep, and combined with his constitution, the bleeding stopped quickly.

"I'm okay now. Just that I'm seeing double when looking at things."

"This cannot be a concussion, could it!? Please remain still."

Eruru's every sentence expressed concern as she moved Hisui to lie down on the living room sofa.

"...Where's that Rushella? She seems to have ran out directly."

"Really?"

"Why did you have to force her to apologize? I know very well how pure-blooded vampires, let alone true ancestors, view half-vampires. It does not bother me either. After all, I think of her as a contemptible abomination too. But you--"

"I didn't do it for you."

Hisui screeched and stopped her.

That's right.

He did not do it for Eruru.

"I was simply angry, that's all."

"......"

"I was angry at her for saying something like that. Whether human or half-vampire does not matter. But for her to thoughtlessly insult others like this makes me angry."

Hisui's face showed faint sadness.

As one of the people responsible, Mei spoke up to break the somber tone.

"Anyway... I have to apologize to you first. I played a part in causing the wine incident. Sorry."

"That really doesn't matter. I already decided a long time ago if I ever needed money, I'd sell off that collection."

Hisui's words did not carry sarcasm or self-mockery.

But Mei sighed deeply upon hearing them.

"...As I thought. I think I can understand how Rushella feels more or less."

"What? I am completely the victim here."

"I know. Everything is her fault. However, it's not like I can't understand how she feels. When a guy talks to his current girlfriend about his ex, it's only natural for her to be displeased."

"What are you talking about? Very regrettably, I have neither a current girlfriend nor an ex."

Hisui displayed a puzzled expression as Eruru calmly pointed things out.

"In other words -- what was important to you was not the bottle of wine but the promise. The promise you made with the vampire who bought the bottle -- Am I right? So the wine is inconsequential. Even breaking the bottle is fine. The reason lies in the fact that the beautiful woman to share the great wine no longer exists. So the most important thing is--"

"Don't talk like you understand everything. Stop analyzing on your own. Besides, I have no interest in wine."

"Even if that is true, Rushella understands things differently."

"When a current girlfriend finds out you still cherish mementos from the ex, surely pandemonium would result?"

"Like I said, I don't know what you two are getting at!? Don't turn every interpersonal relationship into some sort of equivalent exchange of love!?"

Hisui snapped with great annoyance but Mei and Eruru stared at him with a knowing expression.

"What kind of gaze is that? What do you want me to do?"

"You're not going to do anything? I am simply wondering if you're going to leave her alone like that."

"I too, feel that you cannot leave her alone. In a certain sense, keeping her by your side is the condition for maintaining her freedom."

"...How did it come to this?"

"No no, you're not being forced to do anything, okay? Just think of it this way, if the current girlfriend runs away from home after an argument, the boyfriend is responsible for chasing her and bringing her home. This has nothing to do with who's right or who's wrong."

"Are you really the type who can resist when you hear someone say 'Do not press the button under any circumstances'?"

Act quickly -- that was what Mei and Eruru's gazes urged.

Unable to withstand their wordless pressure, Hisui had no choice by sigh towards the heavens.

".........I'm going out to buy some juice."

" "Take care." "

It's all that guy's fault.

The girl repeated the same line over and over again in her heart, murmuring out loud at times.

But the agitation in her heart only increased instead.

After leaving home, she kept looking back for some reason.

No one came from behind.

This was only natural.

But once again she looked back.

"It's all... That guy's fault..."

She said it out again.

That's right, it's all that guy's fault.

Not only was he bound to the vampire destroyed a long time ago, he was also acting intimate with other women.

But still, what happened just now was also--

"Eh, Rushella-san?"

Reina called out to her.

Even on a holiday she was still wearing the school uniform. In stark contrast, Rushella was wearing a low-cut formal dress.

"You...... What is with this presence?"

Rushella could feel a terrifying presence from the classmate standing beside her and instinctively retreated to keep a distance.

Looking carefully, she found Reina holding a cross in her hand.

A vampire's greatest weakness.

A fashionable ornament would be harmless but the one held in Reina's hand was different.

This one had been blessed and sanctified, infused with her faith and extremely threatening to a vampire.

"Oh you mean this? Because I just came back from church......"

Reina pointed towards a certain direction.

Feeling the same indescribable presence from that direction, Rushella's expression became serious.

"Shut up, hearing that word makes me uncomfortable! I deliberately changed my route because I wanted to avoid that side..."

"Huh, you're not feeling well somewhere? There's a park over there, let's go over and rest for a bit."

Expressing care and concern, Reina approached.

Cross in hand.

"D-Don't come over! Put that thing away!"

"Eh, what's going on? Is there something wrong with this?"

"Don't come over, put that down!! Don't let me see it!!"

...Faced with this incomprehensible dispute, Reina finally put the cross to settle the affair even though her face showed complete puzzlement.

Drained by this dispute, Rushella's appearance convinced Reina she was unwell so she led Rushella to sit down on a bench in a nearby park.

"Are you okay? I can see you're holding a parasol. Did you get a heat stroke? I bought you a sports drink......"

"Like I said, I'd be fine if you put that thing away faster......"

Despite complaining verbally, Rushella took the sports drink and drank it.

Then she realized this was her first time drinking something like that.

"So humans drink something of this sort? Still, I think it'd be better if tasted sweeter."

"Ah, I guess people want to drink something sweet when they're tired."

"Yes, especially sweet blood."

Reina clearly did not understand.

Vampire and pious virgin, surely this impossible combination could not communicate on the same wavelength.

"Today... Why isn't Kujou-kun together with you? You two... Are living together, right?"

"...Who knows. After all, he's probably making out with that fake or the half-breed."

"......? Speaking of which, he does seem to be on quite good terms with Sudou-san and Kariya-san. They're always chatting together......"

Reina lowered her gaze as she spoke.

Unable to understand what Reina implied, Rushella tactlessly spoke out about a question that had been weighing on her mind for a long time.

"By the way, you seem to be staring at Hisui all the time. What's the matter, you're concerned about him?"

"N-Not really, it's not like I'm concerned... Umm...... You see, last time when I was kidnapped, he was the one who saved me, right? Though I don't remember much of it..."

"Ah, right...... Something like that."

Actually, Reina was bitten by a vampire instead.

Because her memories after being bitten became unclear, Reina herself had virtually forgotten all of what happened.

Hence, Hisui and his companions took advantage of her amnesia to fabricate a story about how she was kidnapped but fortunately, Hisui discovered it by chance and prevented a tragedy -- That was the plausible story they told Reina without mentioning the word "vampire" at all.

Kidnapped and then drugged unconscious, thus explaining the fuzzy memories -- this explanation seemed to have been accepted, so Reina was still none the wiser.

Hisui had also told Rushella about it, hoping she would not reveal the truth recklessly.

"But then... Umm....... I vaguely remember Kujou-kun... Umm...... It's him who saved me, right...? But when I asked him, he refused to tell me anything......"

"He not only saved you but also me as well. But he is supposed to..."

"Eh, were you involved in that incident as well, Rushella-san!?"

"No, umm...... Anyway, that guy belongs to me!!"

Rushella hastily brought out her trump card to dodge Reina's question.

Somehow she felt uncomfortable being in Reina's presence.

"Really... You two's relationship must be so close..."

"Hmph, but lately he's always taking me lightly!"

"Really? I think he's always cared for you deeply......"

"That's hard to say. By the way, when you're staring at that guy, why do you always avert your gaze as soon as he turns around?"

"N-Nothing, this is... Umm......."

"Just gaze if you want to gaze. Say whatever you want to say. What's wrong with that?"

Unprepared to find her maidenly secret exposed, Reina displayed a worried expression.

Oblivious to tact and worldly matters, the vampire fired off direct attacks one after another.

"...I don't really understand either. I've never experienced this before...... I was raised to ignore these kinds of matters to consider later in life......"

"What is that about? Is it the teachings of that particular deity?"

"Yes, my family... Our faith runs deep. When going to church on Sunday, they tell me I must wear my uniform...... There are also various rules on all sorts of things. Even simple fortune telling is forbidden. It's a bit annoying......"

The sheltered young lady had her own troubles.

But it was impossible for Rushella to understand.

"Mere fortune telling doesn't change anything. Only humans would rely on something like that. Are you one of them?"

"Really...? I think it works to a certain extent..."

"If you have something to say, say it; something you want to do, do it. Don't beat around the bush. Whoever I stare at, the target will always do my bidding obediently!"

That's clearly using your "Mystic Eyes," right? ...This was supposed to be Hisui's customary retort.

But the past familiar dialogue did not appear, causing Rushella to look around her, thinking of Hisui.

At this moment, her own words stabbed herself in the heart.

If you have something to say, say it.

Should she say it to him?

"......Things are not always that simple."

"That's true......."

Although the two girl's faces did not match, they were in clear agreement on a rather crucial point.

Rushella stood up and said to Reina with an inscrutable expression.

"I'd like to make a request."

"As long as I'm able to help......"

I'm going out to buy some juice -- leaving those words behind, Hisui left the house.

But he did not return for a very long time.

Because -- he still had not found Rushella.

He tried attaching a tracking device to her before, but she threw a tantrum after she found out so he stopped doing that.

And she still did not have a cellphone.

Hisui had no choice but to follow the footsteps of ancient vampire hunters and search for Rushella based on a vampire's tendencies and characteristics.

Rushella had left after changing her clothes, taking no luggage with her. She was virtually penniless.

In most likelihood, she would probably return home by herself eventually. In that event, Mei and Eruru stationed at the house would inform Hisui.

In any case, Hisui decided to check the places where Rushella might have visited.

"......What sort of places are those?"

He had no idea at all.

After all, they always went out together. Now that he had to imagine where she might wander off alone, he had not a single clue.

Her greatest desire -- blood was supplied by his person. Other than that, Hisui could not think of another activity for her to while her time away.

Checking out all the places she had been to -- the way to school, the shopping district -- all of them, Hisui could find no signs of her.

Mei and Eruru's side offered no news either.

"What should I do now......"

The sun was about to set, signaling the arrival of a vampire's time of the day.

Once Rushella became fully active, her area of activity was going to be much wider.

I'd better go home first to plan -- Hisui made his decision and turned around to head home.

Walking along, as he turned a corner, he ran into the person he missed.

" "Ah." "

The two of them exclaimed as they pointed at each other.

Then a moment of silence.

Hisui was the first to speak up.

"...Where did you go?"

"None of your business."

Rushella's words stung.

She looked no different from when she went out, except she was now holding a brown paper bag conspicuously in her arms.

"What is that?"

"I-It's... I'm back from 'shopping'!"

"So you even learned a new word like that......"

"Then what business do you have!? Why are you here!?"

"That's my question instead."

Beneath the streetlamp they stared at each other.

Just as they were both about to speak up simultaneously--

A rich thick sweet aroma filled their surroundings.

So thick that the air was dyed a pink color, this gas seemed to carry poison.

Hisui instinctively sensed danger and frantically surveyed his surroundings.

The street at night was devoid of others.

Except for an outline of a figure in an old fashioned red robe, standing quietly.

In her right hand she held a small knife, shining sharply. On her left hand was a small bottle, the apparent source of the aroma.

"Could it be... You're the 'Witch'?"

"Be careful...... That outfit and fragrance, I remember them!!"

The figure approached the pair slowly.

Hisui and Rushella raised their alert.

Then the "Witch" acted unexpectedly.

Though slower than a vampire, she was still much more agile than Hisui.

"......!"

As the two watched in alarm, she reached into her robe with her left hand and took out a new bottle.

This bottle was slightly bigger than the previous and just large enough to rest on her palm. It contained a liquid as red as fresh blood.

The "Witch" tossed the bottle towards their feet.

Dodging in time, they were not struck. The bottle simply shattered against the ground.

By the time they noticed the resulting smell, only then did Hisui and Rushella realize the "Witch" intended to produce this smell rather than strike them directly.

Fairy tales told of sun-dried lizards and frogs being cooked in cauldrons to concoct witches' potions -- currently, the poisonous gas before them was recreating a secret potion from witches of legend.

Hisui frowned and frantically covered his mouth and nose.

Despite the overwhelming stench -- there was no greatly debilitating effect.

He should be able to endure it.

But Rushella seemed quite unwell on the other hand.

Pressing her hand against her chest, she sank down on one knee.

"What, this is...... So unpleasant......"

"Hey, are you okay!? Pull yourself together."

"How does it taste...... This magical potion I cooked using blood and a secret recipe? Blame nothing but your keen sense of smell which has intensified the unpleasant stench. Particularly, your reaction towards the blood should be greater."

"This is... A poison targeting vampires?"

"That's right -- Even your race will be rendered immobile for a while after inhalation. This is -- enough!!"

The "Witch" sprang into action.

In order to protect Rushella who was incapacitated, Hisui stepped in front of her.

"Wait, stop.......!"

Rushella's cries were futile.

The "Witch" had her face obscured by the hood, revealing only the tempting smile hanging over the corner of her lips.

She swung the sharp blade.

The blade slashed at Hisui's arm which guarded Rushella's vulnerable state.

"...Mmm!"

Hisui felt sharp pain.

However, the wound was not very deep.

He originally intended to launch a counterattack with his other hand but the person grabbed his fist. Without a doubt, the sensation on his fist felt like that of a female, but there was some kind of ointment giving a slippery feeling.

"You wish to protect her... In that case, you shall be 'cursed' first instead!"

Twisting the blade, she scraped across Hisui's arm, leaving a cruel trail of bloody script.

Hisui could not decipher it at all, but he was sure those were "words" of some language.

"This... What the heck......?"

The wound was shallow -- but Hisui immediately collapsed.

"Bitch--!!"

Rushella finally broke free from the potion's restraints and wielded her favorite short sword.

Then she activated her "mystic eyes."

Crimson light penetrated the "Witch," placing her under absolute command.

"Stand there obediently... Watch me take care of you personally!"

But completely unfazed, the "Witch" simply smacked her lips.

"Tsk...... Your servant saved you."

Realizing the situation was not in her favor, the "Witch" melted into the darkness and retreated.

Another reason she retreated was probably because she sensed someone approach.

But this was simply the conclusion of this particular hunt.

"Surely I will destroy you next time. Scram -- Vampires!!"

"......!!"

Completely unwilling to accept the outcome, but Rushella had no choice but to watch the "Witch" escape before her eyes.

Frantically, she hurried over to Hisui's side and picked him up in her arms.

"Pull yourself together. Given your constitution, this minor injury shouldn't be any problem, right!?"

"It's not supposed to... But...... The bleeding is not stopping...... What is going on......"

"Be strong! Your blood belongs completely to me... Don't waste it bleeding like this!!"

Rushella's words were arrogant as ever, but her tone of voice was already sobbing.

"Why, why did you have to protect me!? I'm a vampire, you know!? I am immortal! And it's currently at night even... You great big idiot!"

"Shut up...... Whether vampires or humans, it's irrelevant. This is something... I have to do......"

Hisui was still awake but he was finding it extremely hard to speak.

Something invisible, more terrifying than the wound, was eroding his body.

"Also, shouldn't you... Have something to say instead......? Say it... properly... for me....... You only have to... Do that first......"

Finishing his sentence with great difficulty, Hisui fainted.

"Hey... What is going on? Pull yourself together!!"

Rushella cried hysterically as she shook Hisui's body in her embrace.

But he did not wake up.

The next day -- in a sickroom at Seidou Hospital.

Hisui was transported to this comprehensive hospital closest to the scene. This place was also closely affiliated with the "Supernatural Investigations Section" that Eruru belonged to.

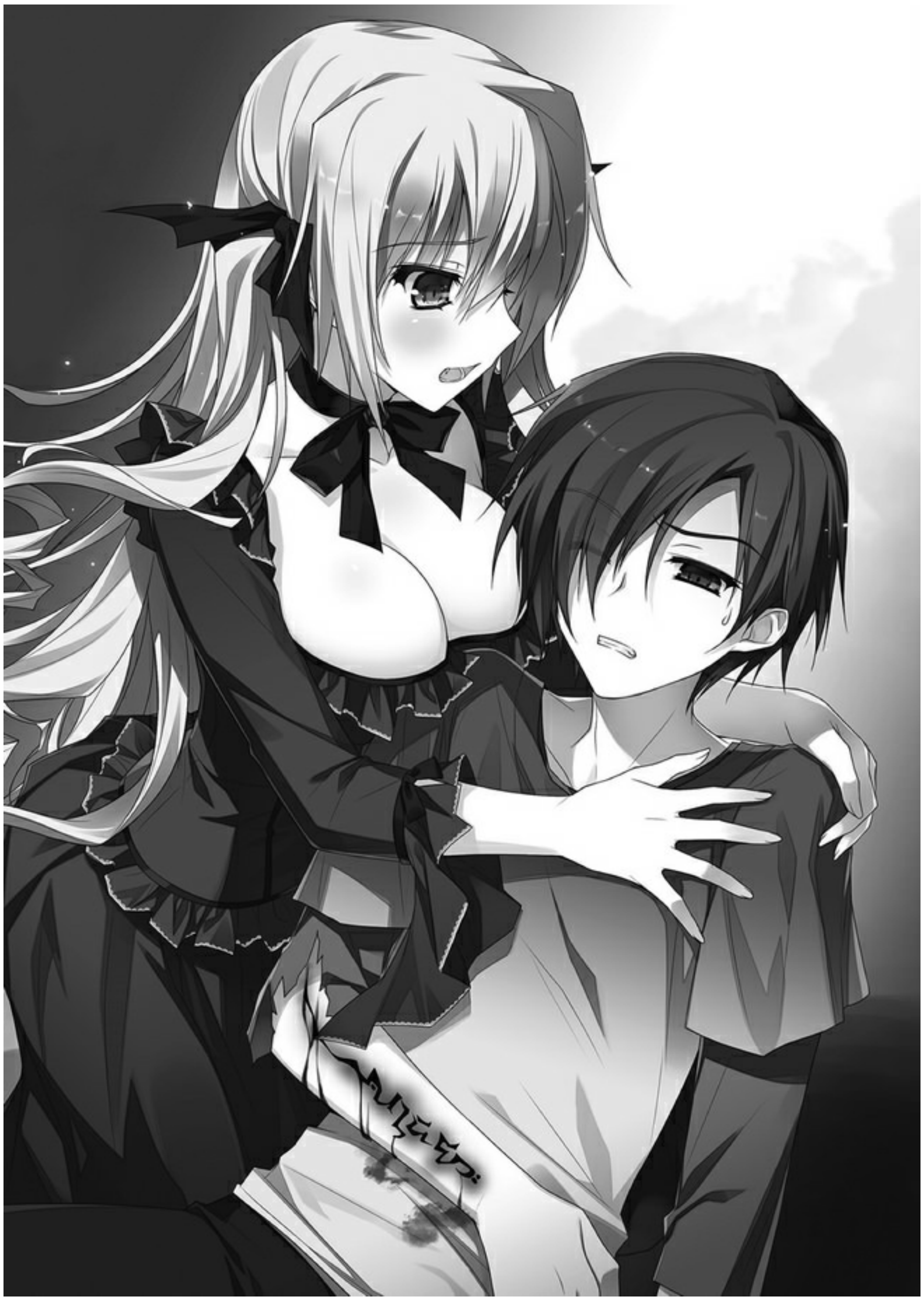
After carrying Hisui home in her arms, Rushella told Eruru and Mei what happened and they immediately called an ambulance for him.

In order to guarantee absolute peace, Hisui was being quarantined in the same room where Reina was once confined.

This implied that he was suffering from no ordinary illness.

In actual fact, Hisui's body only had a shallow scratch -- normally he should heal instantly and be out of the hospital.

However, he still remained unconscious.



Under Eruru's supervision, Hisui had undergone all sorts of tests. On the other hand, Rushella and Mei obtained leave from school and waited quietly beside him for results.

Sitting on the bench outside his room, the two girls' faces were filled with grief.

"The test results came out. The wound is not serious. Given his constitution, it should have healed a long time ago. However, it continues to bleed nonstop. As for the reason -- most likely the knife was poisoned."

Eruru held the patient's chart in one hand as she reported to the two girls. Her face was equally solemn.

"Poison...? What on earth......"

"Based on the analysis of the poison, its primary ingredient is the mandrake. Naturally, it is the most medicinally potent part -- the 'root.' Most likely the missing root from the flower we found at the flowerbed."

Eruru replied to Mei's question in somber tones as she flipped through the charts.

"The mandrake's poison is most effective when ingested orally. Provided the poison was properly prepared, the target, even a vampire, would be immobilized for a period of time. But due to the taste, it is extremely difficult to have a vampire drink it without noticing. Hence it was coated on the knife. Furthermore, this is not purely a 'poison' but should be regarded as a 'curse' medium."

"'Curse'... What does it do?"

Rushella asked quietly.

She was the original intended target of the curse. But Hisui suffered as a result of protecting her.

"Nonstop bleeding. No matter how we try to staunch the wound, the blood continues to flow. This is most likely a curse meant for taking care of vampires. A mere poison cannot defeat a vampire but by making wounds bleed nonstop, a vampire can be weakened continuously. For a vampire, blood is the source of life and the root of one's power. Even though large scale blood loss will not lead to death, a vampire will still be immobilized. Then seizing the opportunity, a death blow can be applied -- this is probably the witch's plan?"

"Since it targets a vampire... What happens when it's used on a human?"

"The result is the same. However, the damage is naturally much higher against a human. More accurately, a human would rapidly bleed to death. The only reason Kujou-san is still alive is thanks to his constitution conferring superior regeneration and blood-making, thereby offering some resistance to the curse."

Because it was Hisui, he could still endure.

But death was simply a matter of time.

"Of course we tried a transfusion, but for some reason, his blood type keeps shifting, making all blood types incompatible. This is likely a kind of curse produced by the poison. In other words, once he bleeds dry there is no hope for recovery. Even right now, the blood loss is slowly draining his life drop by drop. If this continues -- he probably only has one day left to live."

Eruru's words were completely emotionless.

But her face was filled with suffering.

Mei was the same.

Only Rushella turned away expressionlessly and walked towards the elevator.

"What a stupid guy. No self-awareness as a servant."

"Hey, you're really going too far!"

Mei rushed over and held her by the shoulder.

But Rushella did not look back.

Only her shoulders trembled nonstop.

"For him to die and cast aside his duties of taking care of me, it's completely unforgivable! Staying alive to serve me is the greatest prerogative of a servant!"

"......"

Sensing Rushella's true feelings, Mei remained silent.

This time, Eruru spoke up and made a suggestion.

"Based on all sorts of information I gathered at Kujou-san's home, there was one point -- the witch who creates a poison definitely possesses the corresponding antidote. The one who curses others always knows how to lift the curse. Finding the witch and bringing her to justice -- is the only way to save Kujou-san now."

"......"

"Also -- When using the 'mystic eyes,' you must disrupt the target's concentration first. No matter how much mental strength she had, so long as you take her by surprise, even your power can render her powerless."

"...I know."

Rushella ran into the elevator.

As Mei watched Rushella leave, Eruru cautioned her.

"I hope you can stay by her side to assist her. The enemy must be caught alive, otherwise there would be no point. Now that Kujou-san is unavailable, someone has to act in support for her."

"No problem. I'll rely on you to update me on the situation, Eruru-chan."

"Very well... I will continue researching and see if there are other solutions."

As the three girls pursued their respective goals, they prayed in their hearts for Hisui's safety.

His life at crossroads, Hisui's survival was still currently uncertain.

Translator's Notes and References:

1. Lesbians... female vampires: a reference to the famous gothic novella Carmilla which features the eponymous female vampire who preys on young women. Predates Bram Stoker's Dracula.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carmilla]

Chapter 6 - Draculea Versus Witch

By the time Rushella and Mei arrived at school, classes had already ended.

Having packed her belongings, Reina was leaving the empty classroom.

Seizing this opportunity, Rushella spoke to her from behind.

"You there. Girl."

"Hmm?"

The instant Reina turned around, she was pierced by Rushella's crimson gaze.

The "mystic eyes."

The mystical eyes possessed by all vampires, capable of hypnotizing humans.

As a prestigious "True Ancestor," Rushella possessed eyes carrying absolute magical power, allowing her to easily obtain information from the target's answers.

Eruru only allowed Rushella to come here because she was aware of this fact.

In principle, Eruru was reluctant to make use of the "mystic eyes" for investigations, but for the sake of Hisui, she had no choice but to allow it.

"Answer me... Are you the 'Witch'?"

Reina shook her head in denial.

"Well then, why did you mix mandrake leaves into the cooking last time...? Why on earth did you do it......?"

Rushella had already heard from Mei the results of Eruru's investigations.

Hence she rushed ahead to find out the truth.

"That was merely...... A little spell."

"......!?"

Reina murmured with a hollow stare.

Even when a person was controlled by the "mystic eyes," it did not result in a total loss of emotions.

Reina's expression displayed sadness.

"Although that picture book was confiscated, I... still remember...... That is, the recipe for the magical drug...... So, provided I used that, Kujou-kun will surely... even more......"

Even more -- she took forever but still did not finish her sentence.

Perhaps even she herself had yet to fully realize.

Only that her heart had been stolen on that night, by the knight who brought his sword and saved her from the vampire.

Admiration, or was it infatuation -- Perhaps in order to verify her own feelings, she decided to use the magical spell involving herbs.

A secret little spell -- one that all love-stricken teenage girls would harbor at some point or other.

"This is enough..."

Rushella walked away from Reina.

As Reina collapsed and sat down on the floor, Rushella threw a glance of pity at her before continuing on her way.

"...That was enough? Perhaps more questioning might reveal something..."

"Enough. If she wanted to harm me, she should have done it during 'daytime' instead. But on that day, this girl accompanied me all the way until sunset. Without doing anything. That is enough to prove her innocence."

"I see......."

Mei smiled as she followed Rushella running through the hallways.

Their next destination -- the staff room.

Homeroom teacher Horie Jyuri was in a corner of the room, facing a computer.

Presumably tired from work, she had taken off her glasses and was rubbing her eyes.

Rushella patted her shoulder from behind.

Jyuri turned around reflexively.

In the next instant, she was pierced by the light of the mystic eyes.

"Answer me... Are you a witch?"

"......Maybe... so."

Rushella and Mei exchanged glances with surprise.

Maintaining the crimson mystic eyes, Rushella continued the questioning.

"What do you mean by that... Explain clearly! Why was your name on that digest!? Who are you!? What was the Occult Research Club about!?"

"We investigated...... The Seven Mysteries... And legends...... Then, made contact with the witch... However, we were getting too deeply involved...... I withdrew... Halfway...... But the other students......"

"Say, why is the teacher's speech in fragments? Are you sure your power is working?"

"My mystic eyes are not omnipotent. If the person does not know or already forgot, then no answer can be obtained. Deeply buried memories could take a long time to retrieve. Hurry and continue explaining!"

"The other students...... I'm not sure either...... After transferring schools... We lost contact...... There were also kids who went missing...... Witch? Became witches......? The real witch...... Or perhaps, killed by the witch......"

"Who is the witch!? ...Isn't it you!?"

Completely unconcerned with the gaze of others, Rushella grabbed Jyuri's collar and demanded.

Anxious for an answer as well, Mei did not stop her.

Another student in the staff room stepped forward to intervene.

"Hey, what are you two doing to the teacher!?"

Kirika had gotten involved.

As the student council vice president, she frequented the staff room for official business.

Setting down on a table the stack of books she was carrying in her arms against her chest, the vice president glared at Rushella and asked.

Naturally, she became the next victim of the mystic eyes.

"...You might be involved in the incident of the cooking practical. Answer me, are you a witch?"

"No... What is that......"

Kirika instantly lost her usual prideful demeanor, answering as she shook her head blankly.

Rushella clicked her tongue and motioned with her chin for Kirika to leave.

"Then step aside. You're not needed here anymore."

Unsteadily, Kirika left the staff room.

Having confirmed the vice president had left, Rushella turned to interrogating Jyuri again -- but the gathering crowd was increasing.

"Hey... Can we go out for a bit? After all, using mystic eyes to control everyone would be too difficult. Besides, the teacher doesn't seem to be a witch either......"

"......"

Rushella looked greatly displeased but she had no choice but to leave Jyuri behind and swiftly depart from the staff room.

Then she ran full speed through the hallways and out into the school yard.

Mei chased after her and asked as she panted.

"What do we do now? We don't have any other suspects. It's not practical to use the mystic eyes to interrogate everyone involved in the school, right?"

"I have a plan."

Rushella unsheathed her favorite short sword and held the edge against her wrist.

"Hey, what are you intending?"

Rushella did not answer but scratched her wrist with the short sword, producing a red line.

Droplets of blood seeped out from the wound and dripped onto the ground.

Ignoring the laws of physics, the bloodstains on the ground gathered to form an emblem of a rose.

This was proof of her identity as a "True Ancestor."

A sweet fragrance emanated from the fresh blood, causing Mei to cover her own mouth.

I feel compelled to drink it.

If she did not restrain herself, very likely she would already have done so.

Were she to continue smelling the blood's scent, she would very likely lose all reason.

"As a 'True Ancestor' -- My blood is very sweet. So sweet that anyone would thirst for it, wanting to drink, no exceptions."

Rushella smiled fearlessly.

As if to prove what she just stated, they began to gather in the school yard.

In this almost emptied school -- there existed beings with a keener sense of smell towards blood compared to humans, and now they gathered around.

Dogs.

Cats.

Insects.

Innumerable animals were closing in here in swarms.

Gathering out of desire for the blood, they knelt down before her.

The unusual sight rendered Mei speechless while Rushella bore a smile.

Using her crimson eyes, she announced to her loyal subjects who had rushed forth.

"Listen well, you all--"

A dream.

In actual fact, I had dreams every night, although whether I remembered or not was another question. But recently, I suddenly realized that the dreams I remembered were for the most part unpleasant ones.

The reason, obviously, was because -- I had dreamt of my foster parent.

In today's dream, it was that particular scene during dinner.

She asked me to pour some of her favorite wine. She enjoyed the fragrance released from the rich violet liquid as she elegantly drank from the glass.

--You really seem to love wine. Is it because you're a vampire, and wine looks like blood?

--Possibly. But perhaps the main reason is because it reminds me of that man who called wine "this blood of mine."

This foster parent would say strange things from time to time.

As expected of one wise in the ways of the world, she was well versed in the art of implicit communication.

--What are you talking about?

--Old memories, two thousand years in the past. He was a good man. Perhaps that was why I could not defeat him, even as a vampire.

--I'm completely lost here. What about him, was he some handsome dude?

--His long hair and beard suited him very well. But more praiseworthy -- was his noble spirit. Hisui, how much do you think this man would be worth if one had to set a price for him?

--How can people be measured with price?

--Thirty pieces of silver, that was his price. In light of his influence on the future world, that price was truly a bargain. Far too cheap. But the problem lies not in money but this man's philosophy of life. Very likely, I submitted to him because I respected his high-minded soul.

--……

--Hence, Hisui, you too must become a good man. Even if you were to be sold for thirty pieces of silver, you must save those who are suffering around you.

"......What the heck were you trying to say......"

Hisui woke up in the pristine sickroom.

He ripped off the tubes connected to his body and stood up unsteadily.

"Seriously, you're already dead, and yet you still lecture me in my dreams...... Am I really that unreliable?"

Changing into his own casual clothing that lay folded on the table, Hisui quietly walked towards the door.

Blood seeped out continuously from his bandaged right wrist.

He was on the very verge.

On the verge of death by blood loss.

Blood pressure, pulse, all were at their limits.

Precisely because of that -- he awakened at this very moment.

Awakened to obtain a body that could still be active even when under the effects of a curse.

Awakened a resilient body that could rival vampires -- the Anti-Drac mode.

"I know, okay...... This kind of matter... If I were to rely on girls...... Definitely... You'd scold me to no end."

Dragging his body that lay at death's door, Hisui left the sickroom.

Leaving the building, he crawled his way into a taxi... And got a ride home.

During this time, he contacted Mei by cellphone.

Although his hand no longer seemed to be following orders, he still managed to dial the number. Luckily, Mei also picked up very quickly.

"Hi-kun!? Hey, are you alright!?"

"Let's talk about that later... Where's Rushella?"

"Ah, she's currently... This is serious! All these animals have gathered... Ah, but now at least we know the witch's identity..."

"The mystic eyes were used, right?"

"Eh......?"

"She must have used her mystic eyes to investigate. Hurry and tell me the result and the situation over there. Don't leave out any detail no matter how small."

"……"

"Please…"

"I understand."

After obtaining the necessary facts, Hisui hung up.

The pieces of the puzzle were now all gathered. The only remaining step was to piece them together.

Not long after, Eruru received news that Hisui had gone missing.

Then immediately she deduced he must have gone home based on the reports of eyewitnesses, so she jumped onto a police car to rush to Hisui's home.

"Kujou-san!?"

The entrance was not locked and Eruru instantly rushed inside.

No one answered, so she decided to search the basement first.

As expected, Hisui was right there.

Before the cross-shaped holy sword, he looked like he was confessing his sins.

Kneeling on the cross embedded in the floor, Hisui was leaning his forehead against a vivid red gemstone.

"What are you doing...?"

Unable to view the cross directly, Eruru had no choice but to ask with her face turned away.

"I suppose... I'm making deductions. This is the place where I can concentrate best."

Hisui turned his head to answer. Currently, a crest floated above his head, its shape resembling thorns.

Eruru had seen this sight before.

"Are you actually...? Stop it immediately, your current state is akin to a candle's final brightness just before it burns out. Even if you awaken, you are only delaying your death by mere moments!"

"That's enough... Totally enough. I need to concentrate the remaining blood at my disposal, right here."

Hisui lightly tapped his temple.

The amount of blood circulating through the brain took up fifteen percent of the entire body's volume of blood.

Using the Anti-Drac mode to control bloodflow, he was able to raise the proportion and rate of circulation.

Using all the power from his remaining blood, he offered it all to his brain.

"If I use this opportunity to think, I should be able to obtain a satisfactory answer. Let me find the witch."

"What nonsense are you saying......There is no time left. Are you trying to render the girls' efforts in vain?"

"If that's what you think, then hurry back to the hospital. I forgot to get something."

"Huh?"

"Help me retrieve it. I'll probably need it next."

Eruru realized Hisui's intentions at this time.

Nodding lightly, she turned and went towards the stairs.

"...Please do not do anything reckless."

"I'm already being reckless."

After Eruru left, Hisui focused his mind once more.

He mobilized all the nerves in his body.

Confirming all information at his disposal.

Exploring all possibilities.

Ignoring all consequences -- he concentrated his blood in his brain as much as possible.

Blood rushed through his blood vessels.

His heart was beating at its very limit, following a rapid rhythm.

Moments later -- in actual fact it was just an instant of extremely brief thinking, a flash of lightning streaked across his mind.

"--So that's what's going on."

Returning blood flow to normal, he allowed his blood to return to his torso.

Hisui pushed and supported his unsteady body, pulled out the Tzara Blade from the floor and carried it on his shoulders.

Then step by painful step, he walked out of the house.

Walking out the entryway, just as he was crossing the front yard -- Eruru returned in haste.

Behind her was an escort vehicle used for transporting prisoners.

"What a burly looking taxi......"

"If you want to transport that sword, this type of vehicle would be the most convenient. But do not let that sword get too close to me."

Hisui nodded and took his seat in the car.

I was still in school.

Who knew if this was good or bad.

In any case, it was very likely that I would be located soon.

In the beginning, only a lost dog walked into the classroom and started barking madly at me.

Those howls sounded almost like it was summoning its companions.

Then as if passing the orders along, the cries of cats and dogs could be heard all around.

Swarms of insects could be seen flying outside the window, blotting the sky.

I did not comprehend the situation straight away.

What had happened in the surroundings, I did not have a single clue.

But as soon as I heard footsteps -- a vampire's unique, almost inaudible footsteps -- I understood the reasons behind all this.

Regardless, I could tell through my hearing.

I had been found.

By commanding these little animals, she managed to locate me.

Now that I thought about it, witches really are linked to animals in myriad ways.

The familiar I sent to Sudou Mei and Kariya Eruru, as well as the cat I used to warn Kujou Hisui.

For matters regarding animals, asking animals directly was the most effective.

Using the mystic eyes to dominate the animals that were on intimate terms with the "Witch," the animals who had seen the witch would then obediently expose the identity of the "Witch."

My current location was definitely being broadcasted by the barking of dogs.

That said, I had no intention of hiding in the first place.

This location was once their club activities room but I have taken it now. The vampire -- Rushella Dahm Draculea opened the door and rushed inside.

Followed by her companion, Sudou Mei.

"You are -- the witch?"

Hearing Mei's question, I smiled and answered.

"Indeed, while you people are the vampire and her companions."

"How dare you harm my servant? I will surely make you regret this! Uno Kirika."

"That is correct... Let us settle this, vampire."

Indeed, I smiled towards my enemies.

"The vice president is the witch!?"

Hisui's conclusion caused Eruru great surprise.

"That's right, though I have no evidence."

"But I heard from Sudou-san's report that under the influence of the mystic eyes, she said she was not a witch, so..."

"The mystic eyes are ineffective against her. In the manner we discovered in your research, she is prepared. But Rushella probably didn't notice."

"...I see. You mean that she pretended she was under the mystic eyes' influence, and lied?"

"Exactly. Although the mystic eyes are quite convenient, if someone pretends to be under their effect, it is actually quite hard to tell. But the mystic eyes should have worked on the class rep and the teacher."

"How can you be so sure?"

"For the class rep, it's just as Rushella said. If she were the culprit, then all those things she did was futile and too unnatural. However, I still have doubts regarding the mandrake incident."

"Sudou-san didn't mention the incident either... Why did she add that to the cooking?"

It looked like even during such a state of emergency, Mei was still quite considerate of Reina.

Naturally, she understood the heart of a maiden in love.

"What is this? She was secretly doing something without my knowledge?"

"...It's nothing of significance. Please carry on. What about the teacher?"

"Rushella and Mei took your useful advice and took her by surprise. Furthermore, it happened while she had her glasses off. Although it's possible for people to escape the mystic eyes through mental resilience, that requires a major precondition -- being prepared beforehand. 'I will be facing the mystic eyes, very well, I will concentrate in preparation' -- that kind of mental preparation is needed. Rushella took her by surprise from behind at the time. No matter how strong her mental will, she would have succumbed."

"I see -- what was that about glasses? Disregarding sunglasses, ordinary spectacles and contact lenses should not hinder the power of the mystic eyes -- Are you actually implying that the enemy's glasses have undergone special treatment?"

Eruru tapped her glasses and asked.

"That's my guess. Talismans are useless, barriers are impractical. To evade the mystic eyes, applying special treatment to glasses which stand in between eye contact would be the best strategy. If that was done, even unexpected encounters of the mystic eyes could be defended against. But the teacher had taken her glasses off at the time. That said, it's possible those spectacles were simply decoys and she actually wore contact lenses -- but I think that's over thinking things."

"Agreed. By the process of elimination that leaves only the vice president. This means she is wearing contacts, though it is is only speculation. What about other clues? And how did she actually poison Rushella?"

"The vice president frequently visits the home economics preparation room. She must have done something in advance to the food or drink we were having."

"We already investigated this. The results showed that nothing was poisoned, right?"

The two of them had already verified this -- but Hisui disagreed.

"We missed one thing. Didn't she say something like 'I help the teacher prepare the water used for cooking'?"

Eruru suddenly remembered their conversation at the time.

Indeed, she had mentioned that last time.

"The cooking practical requires water taken from the jug. Normally, preparation is as simple as adding ice cubes to mineral water, so why would she need to prepare expressly beforehand? It could be done simply before the practical. Based on what was said back then, the home economics teacher asked the vice president for help to prepare beforehand and put the water into the fridge because the vice president was knowledgeable in herbs and greatly familiar with preparing water."

"What about the water... Are you saying that substances extracted from herbs were added? That the water your group used for cooking had the witch's drug mixed in?"

"If that's the case, it would have been instantly noticed from the taste -- which was what we learned from your research. But consider those western cake houses or restaurants with better service, you must have seen those jars of water with lemons or herbs floating in them."

"Ah yes, quite a few times..."

"That's the so-called herbal water, right? Like the herbs using in cooking, they can be added to the water beforehand to add a faint distinctive flavor. Nowhere near the level of fruit juice, it's still basically water more or less. Most people would simply think this tastes good when they drink it. In order to avoid rousing suspicions when people drank the water, the vice president must have spent quite a lot of effort. Even I failed to notice anything. However, due to the herbs in the water, it caused an adverse reaction in a vampire's body... Should be something like this."

"I see..."

Understanding how the whole incident occurred, Eruru nodded emphatically.

"Also, back when the vice prez saw my arm that had been scratched by the cat, she advised me: 'Beware of infection.' But I was using bandages to hide the wound so most people would expect a sprain or a bruise instead, right? But because she already knew... She knew how I was hurt."

"As much as I am unwilling to admit it, these are quite brilliant deductions. We have no physical evidence but given all these facts we only need to investigate her surrounding environment. Or ask her directly in person. However, why are you in such a rush? Why not just leave it to us?"

Throughout the conversation, Hisui's face became more and more haggard.

Something was worrying him even more than his own life.

"If we don't hurry... Something serious will happen. Rushella will surely do something rash."

"You are the witch...? Then how can Hisui be healed?"

"You really think I will tell you? Vampire and your ilk, scram and begone from this school. You too."

"I understand now... Then I won't be holding back."

The clash between the two was imminent.

Kirika was dressed in that red robe from earlier.

Having realized she was being tracked, she had already made preparations.

Rather than being backed into a corner with no place to flee, this was her hunting grounds for slaying vampires.

"What, this smell is..."

Mei noticed the poisonous fragrance filling up the classroom.

The smell that immobilized Rushella last time was being released from the burning scented candles in the four corners of the room.

"That's right... This is a smell that vampires fear. What will you do?"

Kirika smiled fearlessly.

But Rushella began to move, completely unfazed.

Seeing her mobility unaffected, only then did Kirika realize.

This girl -- she was holding her breath.

With a flash of the short sword, the blade came slicing head on.

Instantly, a long incision had been made on the robe.

Kirika's exposed body was clad in a black outfit.

The representative color of witches' evil. All the vital areas of her body were wrapped in black leather that resembled bandages carved with spell incantations. The rest of her skin was normal in color and exposed for all to see.

On her skin was a shiny and slippery looking oily sheen.

Something was smeared all over her.

Completely unconcerned, Rushella charged at Kirika without delay.

As if toying with her, Kirika ran freely and unhindered in the classroom.

That sort of speed was so fast -- Even Mei could not catch up.

"Do you know of the witch's ointment? A secret medication applied to the body for the purpose of flying. But in actual fact, it has no such miraculous effect. But it is more than sufficient for staying ahead of you--!?"

Kirika could not believe her eyes.

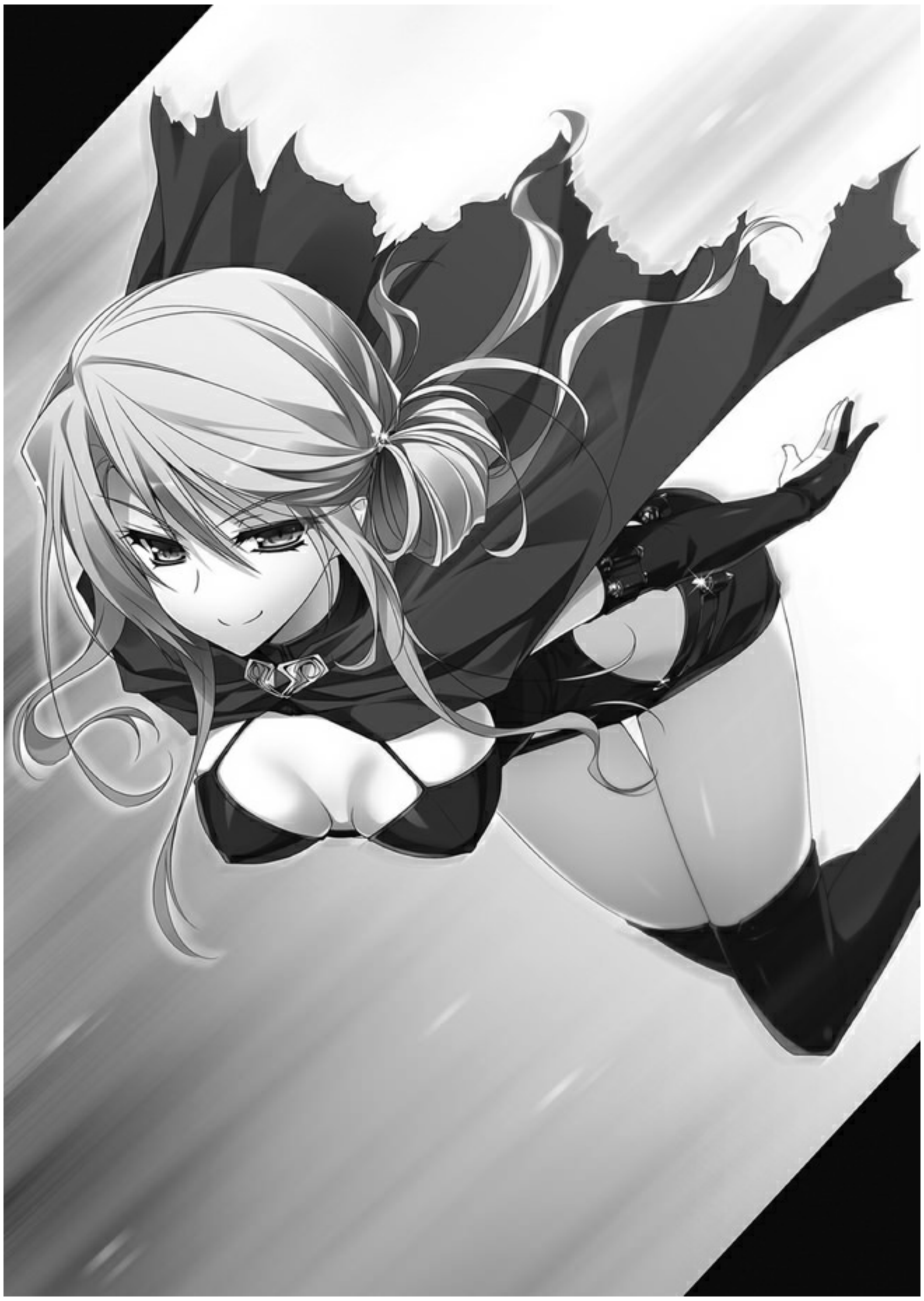
Rushella was already closing in before her.

Eyes blazing with crimson light.

The mystic eyes.

Although Kirika's contact lenses blocked the effects of the mystic eyes...

Apparently due to the eyes' excessive power, the lenses began to crack, causing Kirika to find her field of view fragmented and broken.



Since there was no room for negotiations and the mystic eyes were not working -- Rushella decided to resort to blood sucking.

"You can't!"

Mei's words of warning were ignored by Rushella.

She was like an unbridled horse.

"No……"

Fear spread throughout Kirika's face.

No longer emanating a witch's presence, she was merely an ordinary girl now.

Despite the tears welling up in Kirika's eyes, Rushella mercilessly bared her fangs and extended them towards Kirika's neck.

"………!!"

An unexpected visitor burst in through the door.

Rushella reflexively closed her eyes and released Kirika.

A cross.

Someone had thrown a massive cross.

And allowed the crucial prey to escape.

Rushella felt Kirika's touch disappear from her clutches.

"Don't interfere! If we don't hurry, Hisui will……!!"

To eliminate the enemy, Rushella swung her sword and stabbed the interloper.

Next came the sensation of the blade entering flesh and a faint groan.

"Idiot~"

Even after hearing the voice, Rushella remained in a state of disorientation and did not come to her senses.

Her mind was consumed by Hisui.

These thoughts and feelings combined with her vampire instincts, turning her into a savage beast that knew only to annihilate enemies before her.

In the next instant, her lips were sealed.

As soon as Rushella realized her lips were pressed against another's lips, she felt a familiar taste spreading in her mouth.

The taste of blood.

This was the taste of blood she had grown accustomed to, the first blood she tasted after waking up in modern times.

The bonds of rich thick blood caused Rushella to recover her sanity.

"Ah......!"

Secretly feeling fearful inside, Rushella opened her eyes.

The one locking lips with her was Hisui.

Standing in front of Kirika, protecting her, was also Hisui.

As for Rushella's short sword, it was stabbed into his chest.

"You... Why?"

Hisui did not answer, or rather, he could not answer. For he collapsed on the spot.

"Why?"

Tearfully, Rushella embraced Hisui's head, caressing lightly.

"This... Worked just as I thought. A blood transfusion pack made from my own blood... Kariya brought it here for me, that was really a good decision."

".........!?"

"She said that because my blood type is so rare, I should stock up some just in case of unexpected injuries in times of need. Oh well... I guess it also works as storing food for you."

"You......!"

Rushella's face was covered with tears.

Hisui painstakingly squeezed out his words.

"It's okay...... Because as you can see, I had this in my chest pocket."

Hisui held up the little jar containing the ashes of Miraluka's remains. Rushella's short sword had pierced the jar, causing the ashes to scatter in the air.

"This is your precious..."

"It's fine. I originally planned on using it as a lucky charm... But then, I already have this."

Hisui took out a gold coin.

A memento of extraordinary significance.

It was the gold coin he had received from Rushella on the first day that she moved into his home.

"How could this happen, this kind of thing......!"

"...By the way, there's something important you shouldn't forget...... Why were you going to suck the blood of anyone apart from me......? I will hate you if you do that."

"But, but, you were already......!"

"Oh well, I'm barely still alive. You should have something you need to say, right?"

Hisui stared straight at Rushella.

Using his final embers of life, he asked her.

Rushella nodded repeatedly, tears flowing from her eyes.

"......rry."

"I can't... Hear you......"

"Sorry......"

Tears surged forth like the rupturing of a dam. As Rushella kept repeating this word, she buried her face in Hisui's chest.

Hisui forced out a fragmented sentence as he spoke to Kirika who was staring blankly at the two of them.

"So that's that... Oh well, you can forgive her... Right... She has apologized... now......"

"You... What are you actually..."

"I am just a human. Not a vampire, okay. You were the one who made a mistake. Oh well... Being seen with a vampire biting my neck... A misunderstanding is only natural. I guess for a witch's ointment producer like you... My lack of fear for sunlight wasn't going to convince you of my innocence."

Indeed.

Everything was a misunderstanding.

Anyone observant enough would naturally realize Rushella's identity.

It went without saying that given Hisui and Rushella's inseparable relationship, combined with the fact that she sucked his blood in front of Kirika, it was only natural for her to conclude Hisui was a monster baptized by cursed blood.

"Based on Senpai's personality, if you found out there were vampires in school... Surely you'd take action to exterminate them. Especially since you are a witch possessing these powers. But still, it's quite strange. Why did you kill cats? Why did you incinerate the digest? And the mandrake...

Why plant it in the flowerbed?"

"This--"

"Unrelated... to Rushella. I'm guessing it was a warning to some half-baked amateur magic users. Senpai has been devoting her heart and soul to the school starting from a long time ago. I never realized the truth all this time. Never did I think that Senpai would be an evil witch. That is why only now did I finally decided..."

Hisui understood.

Based on Kirika's manner of thinking, as well as the various fragments of evidence, he knew that she was not a vampire hunter but some other sort of existence.

"The whole incident's cause -- is probably the digest from the Occult Research Club. Although that doesn't count as a grimoire, it did record a little amount of magic. That book ended up being read by someone and the fool tried to apply the knowledge written in the book. This resulted in the first two cats' bodies in the beginning. The dead cats were found by not only Kariya but also you, Senpai. You wanted to stop that person. You wanted to give out a warning. Which is why you cast that magic for others to witness. Since you are an authentic witch, naturally the spell succeeded. Then you expected the person to be scared away after approaching the cat and not touch magic anymore. Oh well, but it turned out to be me who stepped into your trap......"

"...Right. Seeing someone do something so terrible, I could not stand aside without doing anything......! That is why..."

"...Coincidentally, you ran across a cat that had been crushed by a moving vehicle, so you cast magic on it. When I heard the story from Rushella, I found it quite strange. Someone who did something so cruel would not have the heart to offer flowers. Actually, it was you, Senpai, who offered flowers to the kittens, right......?"

"......"

"You also did something to the digest so that the next time the person looked at it they would be scared off... A bit of magic cast upon it. But sorry, I became the lucky winner this time as well......"

"You......!"

"As for the mandrake... It was probably an accident. Horie-sensei said something like... A specimen had gone missing. That was the... mandrake? A witch's inheritance, probably left behind by those people from the Occult Research Club... Senpai, you must have stolen it and recycled it so that it would not be seen by others, right?"

"......Right. But I simply threw the 'flower' away. How careless of me......"

"...Then some fool picked it up and planted it in the flowerbed as an experiment. In the end, I was the one who pulled it out, however. That type of childish trick could not have been done by a true witch. After that, the class rep saw it by chance and for some reason placed the leaves into the cooking as herbs..."

Hisui's voice grew fainter and fainter.

He really was at his limits. The candlelight of life was flickering and about to extinguish.

"You... Who on earth are you...? Clearly you're just an ordinary human, but why.......!"

"Who knows. I understand you want to protect the school from vampires... But that's not necessary against Rushella. Also...... Can you allow us to use this room? I'm placing my life on the line here in exchange."

Everyone present remained silent.

And signs of life were rapidly disappearing from Hisui's face.

"Although I want to voice my grievances properly... But now... I have no more strength...... I really can't go on...... If I said something hateful before I died... That's a bit...... So please. Don't... mind me."

Saying that, Hisui collapsed.

Leaving unremarkable last words, his last thoughts were still considerate of others.

Rushella's mind was totally empty as she stared blankly at her servant.

On the other hand, Mei sprang into action.

"Hurry... Hurry and take out the antidote! You must have it, right!?"

She rushed towards Kirika who was finally brought back to her senses from her dazed state.

"Hurry and take it out... Quickly!"

Eruru pressed the barrel of her gun against Kirika's temple. Even though she knew that this gun was not authorized to shoot humans.

But for the sake of Hisui, this was the only thing she could do.

"Ah yes, I-I know!"

Kirika finally regained composure and handed over a small jar containing a transparent liquid.

Rushella instantly snatched it away, opened the lid and poured the liquid into her own mouth without hesitation. Then she fed it to Hisui via mouth to mouth.

Hurry and wake up.

During this long lasting deep kiss, she prayed from the depths of her soul.

Epilogue

"Oh my, I really thought I was a goner for sure."

Several days later, in a sickroom -- Hisui remarked nonchalantly.

He barely pulled through and survived.

After that, Kirika had apparently performed some sort of ritual for him, but he could not recall what took place.

Oh well, in any case, it's a happy ending -- This type of thinking of his made Rushella mad.

In addition, earlier--

"You insolent fellow... To think you dare steal my... My...... First kiss was......"

"But who knows if it's your first or not. You've lost your earlier memories."

--Thanks to this most foolish retort, Hisui was treated to a sound beating.

Furthermore, Mei and Eruru added fuel to the fire.

"This is all Hi-kun's fault, okay."

"Agreed. As a fellow female, I express my sympathies."

...In the end, the assault continued overwhelmingly.

"I couldn't help it because of the emergency situation, okay!? Besides, isn't it the same for me... Ah, but in my case..."

Hisui's gaze wavered and turned towards Mei, seeking her opinion.

"Sudou-san, kissing family doesn't count, right?"

"Of course it doesn't count. If it did, things would truly be a mess." Hearing Mei's reply, Hisui nodded hard and announced to Rushella.

"Then it's my first kiss too!"

"Jerk!!"

Pummeled by a series of punches, Hisui survived to this day but in a foul mood.

Although they were finally authorized to use the classroom, the club still had yet to make an official application. Neither did it have a name decided.

Hisui was sitting down staring at empty space when Kirika opened the door and walked in.

Eruru had interrogated her extensively, but in order to respect the wishes of the main victim, Hisui, Kirika was released without charges in the end.

Naturally, Rushella and the girls were not going to let her off so easily.

"What business do you have coming here?"

"If you dare harm Hi-kun again, I will be really mad, okay?"

Ignoring the two girls, Kirika handed a paper box over to Hisui.

"This is... Umm...... To express my apologies to you."

"What?"

Opening it, he found a freshly baked apple pie. It was clearly hand made.

"Oh, thank you. I was starting to feel a bit hungry actually."

Hisui stuffed a piece into his mouth without any wariness.

Naturally, the onslaught of criticisms began.

"Hey, show me some alertness, okay!?"

"What if it were poisoned again!?"

"What would be the point of poisoning me again? It's quite delicious, actually. Or are you girls talking about a witch's poison apple? It's not like I'm Princess Snow White."

After Hisui started eating, Kirika refused to leave and took a seat by his side.

Then opening her books and documents, she started working on her own tasks in a most natural manner.

"Umm..."

"What is it? Choosing my work location to complete tasks for the student council is my freedom, is it not? The desk in the student council office is not very convenient and the chair is not comfortable either..."

"But why do you have to sit beside me?"

"W-What does it matter!? And don't you go leaning against her so casually, okay!?"

Seeing Kirika's face turn red, Rushella and Mei had a bad premonition.

Could it be that this girl...

Speaking of which, Hisui did indeed risk his own life to save her.

"You are all allowed to use this room. I will explain to the teachers."

"Ah, thanks. By the way, did you find out who the person playing around with magic was?"

"...I am not too sure. Besides, it is not even clear if it is one person or many... And who knows how many people have read the digest already... Perhaps there might be more than one remaining in the school. M-Maybe... You can come and help? Although it might be a bit dangerous...... From the student council's standpoint... Umm......"

Although her tone of voice was a bit haughty, Hisui did not mind and replied.

"Oh sure, it's not like I'm busy after all."

"This does overlap with the activities of the Supernatural Investigations Section. This school apparently still has many secrets. The club should be run unofficially, or simply under the name of the 'Supernatural Investigations Section,' and unravel the remaining mysteries as quickly as possible."

Eruru calmly decided their direction.

Stomping her feet in fury, Rushella pointed at Hisui and yelled:

"Don't get taken in so easily! Don't tell me that there's some kind of love potion mixed in that apple pie!?"

"What would be the point of using that kind of potion!? Right, Senpai?"

Hisui remained relaxed but Kirika clicked her tongue.

"Oh yeah, there is also such a method...!"

Then Rushella and Mei exchanged glances once more.

Just as they thought, this girl was...

"Give that to me!"

"Hey, what are you doing? It's my apple pie!"

"Shut up! Just in case, I will eat this together with her. This drink is good enough for you!"

Saying that, Rushella shoved a paper bag towards Hisui.

"What's this? By the way, you were holding this that night... What did you end up buying?"

"Grape juice."

"Huh?"

"I asked the class representative to find your... That bottle of wine. But we couldn't find it. When we asked the salesperson, about vintage whatever......"

"That's only to be expected. That bottle was from a year of poor harvest so production should be quite limited. But the few bottles on the market are quite high in quality and their prices keep surging up. If there's no supply, then you can't buy it no matter how much money you have."

"That's why, that's why... This is what I bought. The class rep also said, drinking is not good, that's why, I bought the most expensive juice I could find! Hurry up and... Thank me......"

Saying that, Rushella turned her head away and refused to look at Hisui.

Hisui shrugged and opened the lid of the grape juice.

As the saying goes, there's no point in crying over spilt milk. Likewise with that bottle of wine.

Even if things of the past could not come back, there were new memories waiting to be made.

"Why don't you have some too? It comes with cups."

"...Yes."

"Cheers."

Although the promise with his foster parent for his twentieth birthday could no longer be fulfilled, the bonds of master and servant were engraved thus.

Reaching out and bumping cups lightly with Rushella, Hisui raised his cup and savored the excellent violet-colored wine.

Afterword

Greetings, I am Totsuki.

Just as I mentioned on the fold of the cover, the abbreviation for this series' title has not been decided yet. If everyone could think about it a little when you're free and pitch in some ideas, I'd really appreciate it.

Deciding on an official short form has its advantages. For example, there are conveniences for the editorial department, when specials are published, or in all sorts of situations. After all, the title isn't short at all so using the full name is quite troublesome sometimes.

Looking back throughout history, both local and foreign, most famous works have abbreviated names given by the readers who love them. These short forms contribute immensely to a work's development.

Indeed, a mere abbreviated name possesses such great power!

...I'm sorry, I'm just pulling things out of thin air.

Disregarding grandiose claims about short forms, at least it stands as proof of the readership's support. Of course, I believe that the convenience of referral is also an important point.

It seems a bit much for me to be worrying over such an issue before I even know how readers are referring to this book, so let's talk seriously about the work itself.

The first volume already established Hisui as the weakest protagonist and this volume continues the tradition. Essentially, he's physically weaker than all the girls in the story.

Take sprinting for example, Reina beats him.

Take long distance running for example, Reina would probably lap him once at least.

After that, he would inevitably be confronted by Rushella, but he would surely defend himself thus:

"No no, I really didn't go all out. It's just lessons in school so I'm gonna do things casually without exerting too much."

Then show your true abilities and get fired up! A certain former professional tennis player would probably say that. But Hisui is one of those types who believes "You lose if you get serious." Basically, he doesn't go all out in battle.

The only times he puts everything on the line is when someone else's life is in a desperate crisis, rather than for himself.

In those cases, he will persevere come hell or high water.

Of course, if that weren't the case, the story could never reach a climax.

Due to his constitution, he does not mind getting hurt too much. And it is the people around him who worries over him... Although many of them are not human, in any case, that's the job of females.

Clearly the weakest, but always injured the most each time. That's our protagonist, Kujou Hisui.

On further thought, that makes him quite pitiful.

Let me think for a bit about the future plot, is there some remedy for this?

...Apparently, it's hopeless.

Moving forward, he will continue to be drained, bitten, eaten, licked, beaten and pummeled.

Readers, may you all continue to support our Kujou Hisui and the powerful females.

It's about time to wrap up. Due to my working too slowly on Volume 2, I caused a lot of trouble for the supervising editor and various colleagues at the editorial department.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my apologies to them.

Since this is a creative product, the author should take responsibility. If the readers have any opinions regarding this book, please do not hesitate to offer criticism for it is within my duty to consider them.

Various care provided by the dear supervising editor has also spurred me onwards greatly.

Powered by my regrets, I will strive to write faster, so please continue to support me.

Totsuki Yuu

銀の十字架（クロス）とドラキュリア
Silver Cross & Draculea
III
十月ユウ
ファンタジア文庫

銀の十字架（クロス）とドラキュリア
Silver Cross & Draculea
III

ルシュラ＝ダーム・ドラキュリア
憑いていった人が、吸血鬼の下僕だった。
それだけのことよ。
不破透子（ふわとうこ）
巣道芽依（すどうめい）
?

Prologue

"So, just as I suggested previously, in order to prepare for the upcoming summer holidays, I'd like to decide on the club's activities right now. Very well, please offer your suggestions, everyone!"

The club without the school's official recognition—The Supernatural Investigations Club. Today's club activities started officially with the president's declaration.

Gathered in the empty classroom, the club members indulged freely in their own activities as usual.

Example 1—Sudou Mei.

The girl who prioritized beauty was working on her hair, looking for split ends, casually browsing through a fashion magazine.

Example 2—Kariya Eruru.

Typing away on her notebook computer, her characteristic posture remained completely the same as always. The expression hanging on her face seemed especially solemn today.

Then there were examples 3 and 4—Kujou Hisui and the newest club member.

Unlike the other rest, these two were working together with great focus, stapling sheets of printouts together stack after stack.

"With this, we're almost done, right? Senpai."

"Yes. This completes the materials required for the class committee meeting tomorrow."

Tying the stapled materials in a bundle, Seidou High School's student council vice-president—Uno Kirika nodded with satisfaction.

A regular monthly meeting for all class reps and deputy reps was being held tomorrow.

The meeting was chaired by the student council who also prepared the information materials.

This was supposed to be work performed by the student council members under the leadership of the student council president at their base of operations—the student council office. However, lately the work had been carried out in this empty classroom, with Hisui as an assistant even.

"...Hey, what are you all doing!? Especially you, Hisui! Why are you working for that witch!? When the time comes, be careful or you'll be sent to cook poisonous stews with snakes, lizards in cauldrons!?"

"What? You're talking about that type of sticky job? How could that still exist in this day and age? Am I right, Senpai?"

Hisui found Rushella's words completely ludicrous and sought agreement from Kirika. However, the student council vice-president sighed deeply without returning his gaze.

"That kind of physical labor is rather tiring."

"..."

Apparently, some things never changed even as times progress.

Perhaps one day she might even move a giant cauldron to the club classroom to hold a Black Mass.

"Witches"—inheritors of rituals passed down from ancient times.

Witches were virtually extinct in modern society. However, one of their few descendants resided in this Seidou High School.

More accurately, that particular person was beside Hisui right now.

Having gone through plenty of misunderstandings and suspicions, even becoming enemies with Hisui's group at one point, Kirika finally became a regular visitor to this "club activities classroom" after the incident a few days ago. And for some reason, she decided to make the spot beside Hisui her permanent seat.

"See, you heard it! After all, legends say that witches borrowed the devil's power, right?"

"No matter how I look at it, Senpai doesn't really fit your descriptions. And out of everyone in this group, Senpai is the closest one to me as a living human."

"Shut up, she must be the way I say she is. Surely she prefers the devil!"

"What the heck, you're talking as if she's some kind of devil worshiper? According to you, what do witches do actually?"

"Well... What do they do huh?"

Rushella suddenly tossed the question over to Eruru.

Reluctantly, Eruru looked up from her computer screen and tore her gaze away from it.

"...Why ask me?"

"Because you are very knowledgeable! So what is the relationship between witches and the devil? They have to make some kind of offering, right!?"

"Typically, they offer both their body and soul... Basically something like that..."

After all, since Kirika was present in person, Eruru spoke softly, slightly apprehensive in tone.

But Rushella refused to back down and continued to pursue the matter.

"I see. I can understand offering the soul, but what does it mean to offer her body? I don't see her body being incapacitated in any way, right?"

"No, that is not what I am referring to, umm..."

"What the heck, explain it to me properly!"

"I-It is... Umm... Between male and female... What is known as..."

Eruru's face went red as she spoke. She even glanced furtively at Kirika.

Listening to the conversation, even Kirika herself was getting embarrassed.

"What is that about? What does the devil have to do with anything between male and female!?"

"This... Like I said, umm... That very precious thing, namely... Chastity..."

"Say it louder!!"

...Rushella urged impatiently. At this moment, Kirika stood up, her face all red.

"Stop it, okay! Those are rumors started by certain churches, right!? My chastity is perfectly intact right here, okay!!"

Only realizing the power of her words after she uttered them, Kirika frantically surveyed the surroundings.

Mei nodded nonstop with great interest.

Eruru was so embarrassed her mind was short circuiting.

Rushella's cluelessness continued to display on her face.

Finally... Hisui was staring out the window, pretending not to hear.

Kirika could not help but feel grateful for the silent gentleness and delicacy offered by the young man who was sitting next to her. Frantically, she tried to dispel the misunderstanding caused by her outburst.

"B-Besides, currently in this world, trying to make contact with a high level spiritual existence like the 'devil' is virtually impossible. At most you might encounter supernatural entities with material bodies, such as vampires. A-Although I never expected I would find them in my school..."

Kirika stared at Rushella and Mei as she explained.

She had already known Rushella's vampire secret. After joining the club, she was informed that Mei too was also a nonhuman supernatural creature.

Despite Mei's appearance which was no different from a normal human, the truth was quite unbelievable... Only when witnessing her supernatural brute strength on occasion or whenever she displayed equal combat power in minor conflicts with Rushella did Hisui get a concrete sense of her existence as a nonhuman.

"Hmph, the way I see it, the biggest monster here is Hisui who never turns into a vampire despite accepting my 'kiss' every morning."

"Like I said, it's my constitution. I have no intention of abandoning my human status."

"Every morning huh..."

Kirika's voice carried a meaningful tone as she gazed up at Hisui.

"...Are we having some kind of misunderstanding here?"

"But you and her... On the neck... Isn't that right?"

"Uh...... Yeah, I guess......"

Definitely, a misunderstanding.

Speaking of which, whenever something happened, Hisui could feel Kirika's gaze.

Reluctant to see her slaving away at the student council's workload alone, Hisui occasionally helped her out like he did with preparing the materials just now. But somehow involuntarily, he discovered Kirika was secretly looking at him as she twiddled with her fingers.

"Hey you people over there, stop talking about useless things! Hurry up and offer your wits to solve the mystery of my origins! And make plans for the coming summer holidays! If not, then at least make a 'travel guide' for me!!"

Even though it was clearly Rushella who started the topic of conversation, she was now trying to force the subject back on track.

Two or three days earlier, she had learned about the existence of "summer holidays" mentioned by the homeroom teacher and started to get all excited.

"...What are you talking about here, vampire? If you wanted to, let alone having summer holidays throughout the entire year, you could even hide in darkness every single day. Just make your own plans, okay? I'm totally busy planning my 'memories of the whole summer❤' with Hi-kun."

"Let me state beforehand. I have no intention of participating."

Hisui rejected Mei's troublemaking with a displeased expression.

If he allowed her to have her way, let alone 'memories of the whole summer,' he would most likely be swept into the 'blissful family plan.'

"My club's mission is to act with sincere devotion as my right hand, to unravel the mystery of my origins, and to raise the quality of my blood-drinking life! Have you all forgotten your duties!?"

"As if anyone would do that. Especially the latter half."

"Hear hear. If you want to do anything, do it yourself."

"I'm not idle. I have work from the student council."

Hisui, Mei and Kirika coldly refused.

Staying silent, Eruru displayed a troubled expression. Pausing her hands from typing on the keyboard, she entered deep thought.

"What useless people... Whatever, as a 'True Ancestor' I am more than capable of handling things. I totally don't need any help from a cheap fake or an inauspicious witch."

"Then do your best on your own."

Mei stated simply and began to operate her cellphone, withdrawing her attention from Rushella's declaration.

"Oh, new messages."

She swiftly read through the new messages and indulged herself in playing with her cellphone.

Eruru also resumed her efforts on the computer with renewed vigor.

These two were completely uninterested in Rushella's suggestion from the start.

Mercilessly cast aside, Rushella was just about to seek Hisui's support... But he was currently engrossed in a conversation with Kirika.

"Oh, so in other words, your master was your grandmother, Senpai?"

"Yes, Grandma taught me everything I know. Grimoires, little tools, gardens, she imparted all her knowledge to me. She was very well prepared and equipped for research."

"Based on the way you call her... Could it be that your grandmother was a foreigner?"

"She was true native of England. Apparently a family of witches that passed the tradition down the generations. Also, I am actually a quarter mixed."

"Ah, figures. I always felt you didn't seem very Japanese with your dignified airs."

"......E-Even if you praise me, it's not like you'll get any favors, okay? I baked some cookies... Would you like some?"

"Yes please."

"Here, let me pour you some tea......"

Somehow the two of them ended up having a tea party.

Clearly those two had also cast Rushella completely to the side.

"...Everyone, please don't act like this. Well, it wasn't easy to gather everyone in the same club, so we should... We must have a little bit more 'interaction' right?"

Rushella suggested with a giggle, her tone of voice sounding like she was compromising.

Nevertheless, no one supported her.

All the members ignored her... Or rather, they listened to her suggestion and were focused intently on enjoying their time in the club.

"...This is unacceptable, you people, totally unacceptable!!"

Tears welling up in her eyes, Rushella yelled angrily, and Hisui was just next to her.

But he did not give much of a reaction, merely waving his hand with annoyance before continuing his engaged conversation with Kirika.

"So how's your grandmother recently?

"Her health hasn't been good lately. She had to leave home and recuperate at a facility somewhere."

"I see... I'd like to meet her and talk to her."

"You, talk to me first!!"

Rushella finally exploded.

Bursting into tears, she tugged Hisui's shirt and roared.

Hisui had no choice but to listen to her.

"...So you dragged me out to talk, what's the matter? Can't you give me some peace..."

"But..."

"You totally look like an elementary student who left a note and ran away from home, only to come running back with a hungry stomach before dinner..."

"So annoying, shut up!"

Rushella began to hammer him with her fists.

She was already much stronger than Hisui. Now that sunset was approaching, her strength was even more frightening.

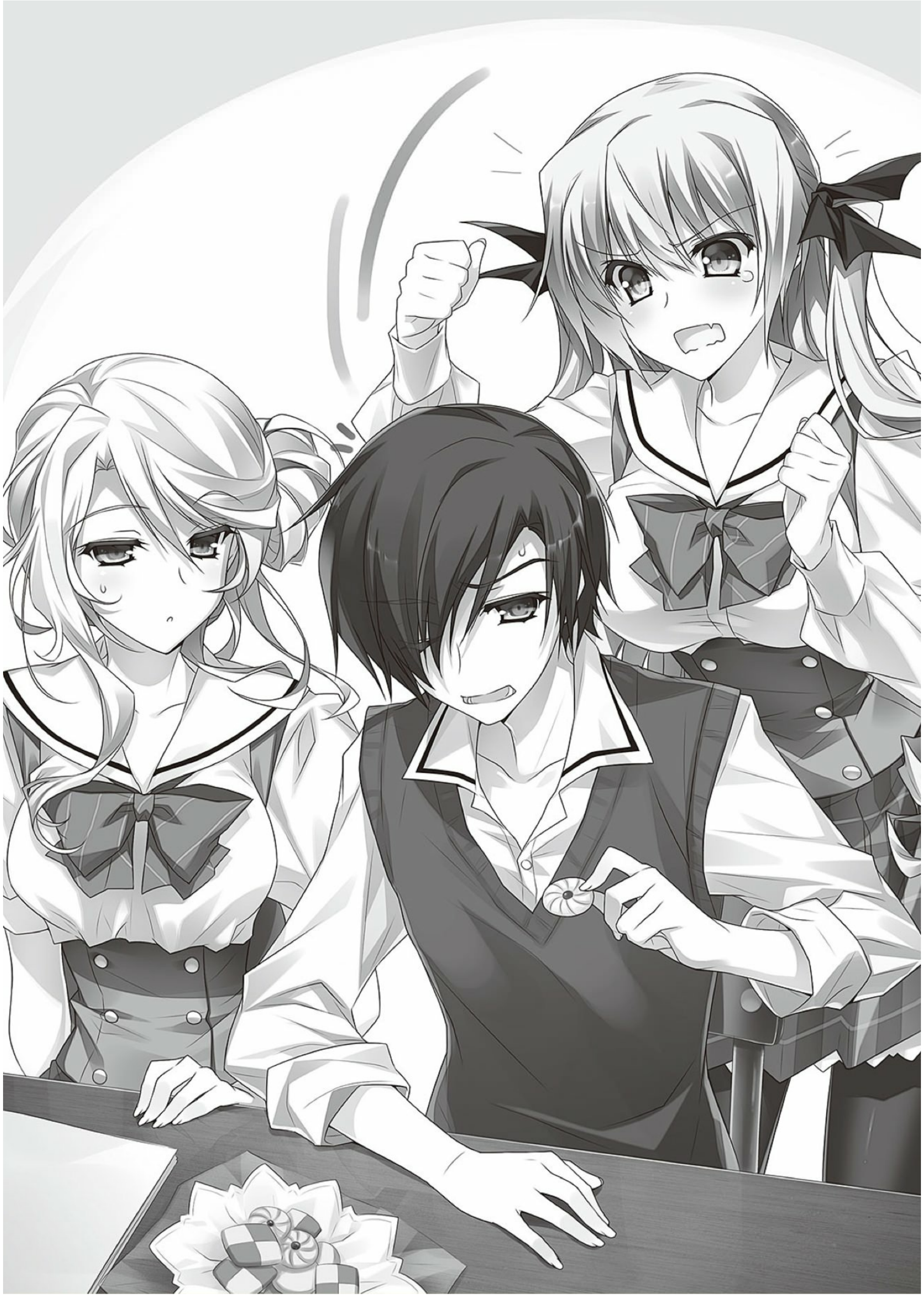
Seeing Hisui suffering again, Eruru could not help but speak up.

"By the way, an acquaintance gave me several of these free vouchers for the cake buffet at Seidou Hotel. Sweets are not my thing, so if you are interested, please take them."

Presented in Eruru's tiny, opened hand were three vouchers for entry.

Rushella stopped the violence and turned her attention over.

"What is that? And what does 'beauvais' mean?"



"Simply stated, you can eat as much cake as you want. Isn't this buffet the one that's quite popular recently? The desserts at that hotel seem quite high-class, I've been wanting to go actually."

Mei explained as she reached out and took a voucher.

"What do you think, Senpai? I'm sure you should be interested, don't you enjoy making snacks quite a bit? I don't want to go alone by myself."

"That's true... Hmm. A while ago, I did consider checking it out. The pastry chef at that hotel is quite famous."

Kirika also seemed interested and took a voucher from Eruru's hand.

One remained.

"I can eat as much cake as I want...? To think such a dream-like place existed......? Using an analogy, it'd be like Hisui offering me his neck voluntarily, begging me to drink his blood!!"

"What kind of analogy is that... By the way, are you going? The expiry date on there is Saturday, in other words, tomorrow is the only day left."

Seeing Rushella's longing expression, Hisui gave her a friendly reminder.

"B-But... Is it really okay for me to go? Aren't you always stopping me from eating sweets!?"

"Don't describe me like some kind of mom who restricts intake of junk food. Since it's a buffet, of course you can eat to your heart's content."

"But there's only one voucher remaining......"

"Oh, I'm not really interested. Besides, sweets are not my thing either. Also, isn't this restricted to girls only? Even if I'm allowed, I'll pass on this kind of occasion that's packed with girls."

Hisui shrugged and reassured her worries.

Hearing him say that, Rushella finally stopped her tears and smiled.

"Really... Very well, I'll accept it. I'm sure you'll be quite lonely without me by your side during the weekend. Watch the house like a good boy and don't cry, okay?"

"Do you really think you're in any position to say that?"

Hisui was not completely relieved but since Rushella's spirits were lifted, plus the rare arrival of a completely free Saturday... However, things never went as one hoped.

Because a little later on the way home, Hisui discovered he had received a text message from Eruru.

Even though their eyes had not met much today, the contents of the message made his heart race.

"Please accompany me for a while tomorrow."

Chapter 1 - Coffin from the Bottom of the Sea

"...And so, why did you call me out specifically? And of all places, why here?"

Hisui's puzzlement was only natural.

The tall building standing before him was no stranger to any Tokyo local, or even Japanese people in general.

In it resided an organization that no one would want to enter for a cup of tea, yet it was indispensable to society.

And this place was its headquarters.

This landmark frequently appeared in crime dramas, standing tall in the heart of police territory—The Metropolitan Police Department's headquarters.

"To me, this is simply my workplace. Because the Supernatural Investigations Section's headquarters is here as well."

Eruru was speaking in a business-like tone of voice.

Yet she had changed into weekend attire consisting of a frock and frilled skirt.

Naturally, Hisui was dressed in casual clothing as well, consisting of a loose-fitting shirt and casual tie on top with jeans on the bottom. He had picked this choice of attire in consideration of the fact that he was going out with a girl.

Of course, never did he at any point consider today's appointment a date with Eruru—but this sort of rendezvous point had him completely floored with surprise.

"Although I expected it was most likely something to do with your work, I never would have thought it'd be this place. And anyway, why did you ask me to bring this thing?"

Hisui pointed to the load he was carrying on his back. The human-height cross wrapped in white cloth.

People often used "carrying your cross" as a figure of speech but Hisui was currently carrying a real cross weighing close to thirty kilograms.

This was the Tzara Blade usually embedded on the floor of his home's basement.

Hisui had specifically brought this massive anti-vampire weapon with him as part of Eruru's request beforehand.

"Even though you helped arranged a car for me, which helped a lot... This thing is really heavy. Besides, even wrapped in cloth, you wouldn't want to get near it, right? How about you keep a bit more distance from me?"

"It matters not to me, but you will get lost, you know? It is fine, so please follow me."

Although she was afraid of crosses, Eruru lead the way unfazed.

Helpless about the fact that the giant cross was excessively conspicuous, Hisui had no choice but to hurry and follow her.

Despite the challenge of walking under the weight of this thirty kilogram cross, Hisui could not allow himself to hand it over for Eruru to carry.

Even separated by cloth, were she to touch it, surely she would suffer ill effects.

As a half-vampire—the offspring of a human and vampire pairing—she was vulnerable to all vampire "weaknesses," be it crosses, sunlight, garlic or the like.

In spite of all that, she still asked Hisui specifically to bring the Tzara Blade. This implied that the matter must be quite serious indeed.

The path Eruru led him along was apparently reserved for staff with passage restricted to a select few. It led straight to the underground of the Metropolitan Police Department.

There were very few people around and the surroundings had gotten dimly lit before Hisui could notice. In the end, no one else could be seen around.

Advancing along the path in the depths of the Metropolitan Police Department towards who knows where, Hisui inquired Eruru about the matter from yesterday.

"You must have planned the cake buffet thing beforehand, right? Most likely to get Rushella away. If you wanted me to go out on a holiday, you can't have that girl getting in the way. This was the trap you designed to make her separate from me voluntarily. For the purpose of making that glutton with the sweet tooth fall for the bait, a girls only cake buffet is the best plan."

"......"

"But letting that girl wander the streets alone is very dangerous too. Besides, monitoring her is part of your duties. That's why you sent Sudou and Senpai to accompany her. When Sudou received a text message back then, you were the sender, right? Probably a message like 'I'll give you a buffet voucher later, tempt that girl to go along too.' Going with the flow, Senpai was invited as well, right?"

"You really are smarter than average still. So what if that is the truth? Are you going to reproach me for being a calculating woman?"

"Of course not. This is the best decision. After all, no one is getting the short end of the stick. If anything at all, at most I lost a valuable holiday's worth of time. Anyway... Asking me to bring the Tzara Blade, and requiring both of us to team up here, it must be no simple matter, right?"

Completely sincere, Hisui was not angry.

This was despite the fact that he had basically figured things out when Eruru asked him out.

It was surely related to vampires—And now that they had to run over to the Metropolitan Police Department, things definitely seemed unusual.

Eruru also appeared to have no intention of covering things up. Continuing to walk in the lead, she explained patiently without rushing.

"...A few days ago, offshore of the Seidou harbor, a sunken ship was dredged up. During the course of a resource survey completely unrelated to us, something was discovered... After we investigated, we realized it was a tricky situation."

"What was it? Some sunken ship as famous as the Titanic?"

"The ship is nowhere near that romantic. This ship sank at most ten years or so ago. And most likely it was privately owned. In terms of luxury it is comparable to the Titanic but it does not count as a passenger ship. Also, this ship is apparently illegal and not registered. Despite having sunk so long ago, for this matter to be discovered only recently, something fishy is going on for sure."

"I see. I guess there's no dormant treasure inside either."

"Several human skeletons were found. Their identities are currently under investigation."

"......."

"We have arrived."

Eruru stopped before a secure door.

The door looked like it was made of heavy metal. It was also equipped with a card reader, fingerprint verification and other strict security measures.

Its thickness was probably quite frightening too.

Or perhaps, Hisui was only witnessing the tip of the iceberg as the first of many layers of security.

"Of all the objects dredged up, the most important one was transported here. Today I asked you here in order to perform a test—Or rather, I wanted you to participate in the unsealing operation."

"Unsealing? ...What the heck did you dredge up?"

Eruru opened the door instead of answering.

Accompanied by the sound of activation, the door opened, its left and right halves sliding apart.

Before them was another door, separated by a corridor a few steps long.

Hisui and Eruru followed the corridor, passing through several heavy doors along the way that opened up for them.

After passing through multiple layers of security, they finally reached a large, plain room surrounded by four walls.

The top part of the walls had a portion made of glass, which seemed to count as windows.

It resembled operating theaters where medical interns could observe. Behind the glass, several figures were watching from an elevated position.

Since so many strict layers of security were passed along the way here, the glass up there were most likely reinforced to withstand average impacts.

However—why on earth was such strict security needed?

"I hope it's not for imprisoning some vicious criminal… Come on, what on earth is the thing?"

As if answering Hisui's question, the lights overhead turned on, focusing on an object sitting in the center of the room.

"……!!"

It was a coffin.

Multiple layers of chains were wrapped around it, imprisoning whatever lay sleeping inside.

From gaps between the chains, one could catch a glimpse of the coffin and see that its design was quite intricate.

With a high-class appearance of deep purple, the coffin was ornamented with detailed carvings.

As if highlighting the owner's stature, the outer appearance was exceedingly ornate. This was no simple burial vessel but a worthy work of art.

"This is……"

The outline covered by chains seemed familiar to Hisui.

Approaching it, he examined its appearance in detail.

Whether the skilled carving technique or the overall impression exuded—all of it seemed so similar.

Absolutely too similar.

To that particular coffin he was used to seeing every day.

The coffin Rushella had placed in her own bedroom.

"This was dredged up along with the ship."

Hearing Eruru speak, Hisui slowly turned around and asked:

"Are we going to open this?"

Eruru nodded silently.

Hisui returned to his position just now and stared at the coffin.

On that day, Rushella had woke up from her coffin in the mountains.

That was the beginning of everything for that "True Ancestor" girl.

Then what was going to appear from the coffin before his eyes here?

No one knew the answer, but one could make a basic guess. Hisui tightly gripped the Tzara Blade carried on his back.

"Yes, this is great!"

Enjoying the cake buffet, Rushella was greatly pleased.

Piling her plate with cake, she swept everything clean with ravenous appetite.

Starting from the banquet's opening, she had been eating nonstop, causing Mei and Kirika who were sitting opposite to be at a loss for words.

"How could you eat so much... I never knew vampires had such a sweet tooth?"

"Perhaps your nerves for sensing fullness are damaged? Be careful of getting fat... Though I guess vampires have no worry of that."

Mei and Kirika shrugged in exasperation successively.

The amount of cake on their plates were relatively normal. Cakes were wonderful and all, but for the sake of maintaining their figures, they had no choice but to rein in their appetite.

"I'm not sure why but my body seems to be thirsting for sweet tastes. But ultimately, nothing tastes sweeter than blood. I'm feeling a bit thirsty, it'd be nice if nearby there was..."

Rushella licked the cream near her mouth as she murmured with thirst.

The sight of a vampire like this was enough to send chills down one's spine.

"Hey don't show your true self in a place like this. If you want something to drink, there's as much juice and tea as you want."

"In my view, the taste of blood does not match very well with cake. Or perhaps a vampire's sense of taste is peculiarly different after all?"

Kirika was clearly being sarcastic but Rushella pondered her comment seriously.

"Hmm, that makes sense. Hisui's blood is more tasty when savored by itself. I'll have a good drink when I get back!"

Rushella's eyes glowed as she declared.

Precisely because this statement came sincerely from her heart, pure and innocent, it felt even more terrifying to the viewer.

Hisui very likely felt an inexplicable chill right now.

"I never understood all this time, why are you so obsessed with Hi-kun's blood? Though I suppose he is young and handsome, which should satisfy a vampire's tastes."

"Indeed, I am quite curious too. I heard from grandma that vampires normally prefer the blood of women instead..."

The subject of this conversation between girls might seem a bit too bloody, but precisely because Hisui was not present, it was a perfect opportunity to explore the issue.

But Rushella simply dodged the question.

"...No idea. Do I need a reason to like things? It's just like the cake before my eyes!"

"That sounds like a carefully phrased, shocking confession?"

"So it's that principle after all? The same way that food cooked by the person you love tastes especially good?"

Mei nodded in agreement with the viewpoint put forth by Kirika.

"Are you two misunderstanding something...? Besides, people who possess blood worthy of my attention are exceedingly rare. Simply through unaided vision, I can tell roughly what a person's blood tastes like. For example, you two completely fail to arouse my interest! The same goes for any other male! Make no mistake about this!"

Despite Rushella's domineering tone, she was blushing.

In order to hide her embarrassment, she turned to wolfing down her cake and averting eye contact.

"Oh well whatever. No matter how much affection you show towards Hi-kun, you always turn cold within short time."

"What are you talking about?"

"Senpai, you should understand. After all, one of them is a vampire while the other is human, right? The age difference resulting from the passage of time will become more and more pronounced. Perhaps the blood of the youthful is more tasty and once someone grows up, the attraction will be cut down by half? At least for the blood?"

"Ah, that does make sense......"

Kirika nodded in agreement.

With a human couple, growing old together through life and the passage of time was a worthy experience to savor. But a human and vampire couple would be a different matter. Only the human would age by him or herself.

"Th-This...!"

The flawless viewpoint proposed made Rushella dumbstruck.

Although they appeared to be the same age currently, Hisui was going to age visibly sooner or later.

The taste of his blood would probably decline.

Furthermore, their relative positions... No, only Hisui's position would gradually change.

"Th-That guy should simply become my servant as soon as possible! Then with that...!"

"I will not allow anything like that to happen... That's what I'd like to say, but there's no need apparently. Hi-kun's constitution makes it impossible."

"Apparently so. I was quite shocked earlier... To think he could get his blood drained to such a degree without being turned. Your method surely will not work."

Completely immune to being turned into a vampire, the Anti-Drac.

Despite having his blood sucked by Rushella in full view of these two girls, Hisui's body never underwent any changes.

The fact of the matter stood firmly, better than any argument.

"Hmph... One day I will surely make him my servant. As for now... Well, recovering my memories is more important!!"

"True. Although I hate helping you, it's better to have you recover your memories sooner. Once that happens, you will voluntarily leave Hi-kun alone."

" "......?" "

Kirika and Rushella displayed puzzlement.

"You don't get it? Because once you recover your memories, of course you'll remember your kin... Or about your family, then you'll return home, right?"

"Ah... That makes sense. Although it is unknown how long you have lived, given you are an undead vampire with perpetual youth, it would not be strange to have a large family."

Kirika was the first to understand, nodding in agreement.

Indeed, vampires who had lived through the ages was very likely to have their own families.

"Let alone a boyfriend, perhaps you might have married, with children even. In the end, you might find out you're the mother of two or something like that? If that's really the case, Hi-kun no longer needs to take care of you, and you'll go home, right?"

Mei smiled malevolently.

Rushella objected with blushing embarrassment.

"W-What are you talking about!? O-Of course there's no... No lover at all! First of all, no other male even registers in my eyes..."

"...Perhaps not in the present, but who is to say it didn't happen centuries ago? It's not like I believe you are a 'True Ancestor,' but given eternal youth, it's probable that you've experienced a few romances more or less, right? In that case, marriage and children is perfectly normal. Besides, without your memories, on what basis are you refuting this?"

Unable to find words to object, Rushella could only turn her head away.

Channeling her displeasure elsewhere, she reached out with her fork to snatch away the last piece of Sachertorte chocolate cake from Mei's plate.

"Hey, what on earth are you doing!? I wanted to save this cake, the one that was limited in quantity, for the very last!!"

"You're being noisy, so shut up!!"

Rushella stood up directly and headed off to find new prey.

"...Jeez, does she really have to get so flustered when she gets poked in a sensitive spot? What a petty 'True Ancestor' she is!!"

"...Indeed, rather than the lord of the night... Describing her as a girl of our age would be a better fit. But why is it like this......?"

Kirika began to ponder with a bemused expression.

Compared to Mei, she had not spent as much time getting along with Rushella.

Although she had already heard Hisui explain basic facts such as her being a "True Ancestor" and "amnesia"—It was still difficult to accept.

"You look like you have a lot to say... Is there something wrong with that girl?"

"Do you not find it suspicious? Her personality, preferences, tone of voice... None of it resembles a 'True Ancestor' who had experienced a lifetime of eons. She is essentially a spoiled high school girl who throws tantrums all the time."

"Well, apart from drinking blood, that's really true... But isn't it just the result of losing her memories?"

"Wiped of memories, I suppose mental age would be set back more or less... A lack of life experiences would indeed feel more childish. But even so, her personality cannot change entirely, right? It is not like erasing data like a machine results in a pristine child."

"What you say makes sense..."

Memories—in other words, everything one had seen and heard throughout one's life had a great influence on the formation of personality. This was indisputable.

Nevertheless, Rushella was quite strange indeed if considered from this perspective.

"And speaking of losing memories, she should have no memories from before waking up in her coffin, right? But the minimum memories... Or rather, she does have knowledge essential for staying alive. No, based on what I heard from Kujou-kun, she is quite knowledgeable about vampires. In that case, her personality is supposed to resemble more of a vampire who had lived centuries, no, millennia... But in actual fact..."

"It completely doesn't feel that way. You're right, if all her memories were lost completely, then even if her body had matured, her mind would regress back to a child's... But Rushella was not childish to that degree, yet one could not feel traces of age from life's experiences... What is going on?"

"Did she really... Lose her memories?"

Kirika wondered with a solemn tone.

Entering into contact with Rushella as a third party, she seemed to be figuring something out about the matter.

"Hey hey Senpai, are you suggesting that she's pretending? That can't possibly be right no matter how you look at it. At least I don't think she could deceive Hi-kun... Besides, what would she gain by doing so?"

"No, I am not saying she is lying... Rather, I am wondering if her memories ever existed in the first place."

"......!?"

"Looking at her, you really cannot tell she is a 'True Ancestor' having lived for millennia and lording over all vampires from the pinnacle. How should I describe her? ...Perhaps I am not expressing this very clearly, but take for example a girl of our age, suddenly turned into a vampire... That is the kind of feeling I get."

"......"

Mei was unable to refute this hypothesis.

Naturally, there was no definite proof either.

Nevertheless, the 'True Ancestor' vampire before their eyes was currently stacking cake on her plate.

Possessing neither life experiences nor fragments of lost memories, she was simply a girl in the springtime of youth, a smile blooming on her face from the sweetness she tasted in her mouth.

Maintaining her solemn expression, Kirika took a sip of tea.

Amidst the drifting steam, she narrowed her eyes and used a "Witch"'s sharp gaze to scrutinize Rushella.

"Where on earth... did you actually come from?"

"—Next let us begin the unsealing operation."

Eruru announced solemnly at the underground of the Metropolitan Police Department.

In response to her orders, members of a police tactical team put on protective gear, took up their tools and surrounded the coffin.

Due to the special job requirements of the Supernatural Investigations Section as well as precautions against potential threats hidden in the coffin, neck guards were added to their issued gear, protecting their necks securely. Other parts were also carefully reinforced to prevent penetration from vampire fangs.

Just to be on the safe side, they all hung crosses around their necks as well.

A normal person would probably fall over in laughter if they saw such a scene, but everyone present were completely serious in their expression. Furthermore, the Tzara Blade carried on Hisui's back could also be considered a cross they relied on psychologically.

Under Hisui and Eruru's gaze, the team members began the task of cutting the chains.

Due to soaking under seawater for so long, the chains were severely rusted and had lost their former sturdiness.

Very soon, all the chains were severed in turn, revealing the coffin's full appearance to all present.

It looked more and more similar.

At the very least, Hisui was certain it came from the same craftsman who made Rushella's coffin, or a closely related maker.

"Then... Please open it."

Eruru issued orders solemnly.

The team members nodded to each other in acknowledgement and gripped the coffin's lid.

Slowly, slowly—the long sealed lid was gradually opened.

A faint fragrance of the tides wafted out.

The coffin from the bottom of the sea, its content was going to be fully exposed today.

The team members cautiously moved the lid aside—Then retreated together and kept their distance.

Rather than suddenly struck with fear, they were probably following Eruru's strict orders given beforehand.

This was for the sake of handling what was contained in the coffin, in order to keep casualties to a minimum.

However—

"Eh...?"

There was nothing inside.

The coffin was lined with comfortable cushioning as fit for a vampire's sleeping quarters—but the owner was absent.

Completely empty.

Eruru stood expressionlessly in one place while her team looked at one another in puzzlement.

Only Hisui walked up to the coffin to confirm its interior.

No one tried to stop him.

Or rather, there was no need to stop him.

Because no matter how one looked, it was empty.

"……"

Examining the inside in detail... Still no clues could be found.

Because a lot of seawater had seeped in, there was a heavy damp smell and it was quite wet.

But apart from there was nothing special of note. No trace nor possessions left behind by the owner could be found.

Sticking his neck in to investigate deeper, Hisui still found nothing.

Then to understand the coffin's structure and tactile feeling, Hisui reached with his hand towards the coffin surface.

Just as his fingertips were about to make contact with the coffin's edge—

—Don't—

Hisui withdrew his hand in surprise.

But the surrounding people simply reacted with bemused expressions at his behavior.

They apparently had not heard the voice.

(...Was I hallucinating?)

Just as this notion flashed across his mind, he suddenly felt an intense chill.

Perhaps having been submerged in seawater for so long, the coffin's surroundings were comparatively colder.

Just now when he had heard what sounded like a human voice, Hisui had felt a cold sensation flying past... But that was all.

The empty coffin before him showed no unusual signs.

"...What is going on?"

Hisui turned around and asked. Before Eruru could answer, another person in the corner of the room responded.

"What a complete embarrassment, wouldn't you say, special consultant Kariya?"

"...Who?"

There were several members of the police before Hisui's gaze.

The one who spoke was a woman dressed in a suit and leather shoes who appeared to be their leader.

She had a tall and trim figure with slender arms and legs. Combined with a very short black hair, the description "cross-dressing beauty" seemed a custom fit for her.

Were she to appear on stage with a male role, surely screams of excitement would be elicited from the audience.

Her exquisite face showed no traces of cosmetics. Rather than beautiful, it would be more appropriate to describe her as handsome.

Roughly twenty years of age or so—Quite young for a proper police officer, but given her presence here, she was most likely no ordinary member of the police.

"Oogami Rangetsu—here to make your acquaintance. Unlike the special consultant over there, I am an official police officer of the Supernatural Investigations Section."

As if showing off her identity, Rangetsu displayed her police ID badge.

"Uh... Hi... What did you mean just now when you said embarrassment?"

"Just as you see here. Clearly there is no vampire but to have allocated so much personnel and squandered so much time, what an utter waste of police resources and facilities. All this effort for naught."

Her voice sounded husky like a young man's while her words were completely merciless.

This tone of voice somehow reminded Hisui of his first encounter with Eruru.

"But how could one know without opening it......"

"How utterly foolish. Before it was unsealed, the coffin had already been examined in various ways such as X-ray and ultrasound. All tests reported an empty interior... But this person here stubbornly insisted on carrying out the unsealing operation in this special facility."

"......"

"I am not implying that it should not be opened. Anyone in the Supernatural Investigations Section would recognize it as a vampire's possession. Besides, as an object dredged from sunken wreckage, investigations are definitely in order. However, there is no vampire in it, right? Then it's simply an antique and investigations should be left to forensics upstairs. Does everyone here agree?"

Rangetsu's words were addressed to the people watching above on the other side of the glass.

Although Hisui could not see the expressions on the people above, he could see several of them nodding in agreement.

Rangetsu's words were like a closing statement. Losing interest, the figures turned and left, disappearing from behind the glass.

Then the team in charge of the unsealing operation began to clear up and leave the scene dejectedly.

"Oh what a disaster for you too, getting called out here expressly on a holiday. Oh well, since she exterminated the vampire she raised personally, she has no choice but to turn to civilian collaborators."

Rangetsu sneered.

Her words mocked Eruru mercilessly.

The vampire she raised personally—this was obviously a reference to the man who had concealed his identity and worked by Eruru's side, kidnapped Rushella and finally was exterminated by Hisui.

It was true that he was the subordinate she trained. But had she known he was a vampire? obviously she would not have kept him by her side.

"I can understand how you might be a little zealous in trying to make up for your past blunder, but you should pay a little more attention to others. Otherwise, you'll just end up causing trouble for others—"

"Actually, didn't this turn out great?"

Faced with her endless lecturing, Hisui stretched himself and interrupted.

"Be quiet, child. This is an investigation..."

"Why can't we be happy that things turned out peacefully? No matter how much checking you do, this does concern a vampire, and ultimately the coffin needs to be opened directly for confirmation. Supposing the being inside the coffin actually existed, it should be quite weak after being immersed in the sea for so long, and indeed such strict security might not have been necessary... But isn't this just hindsight? Could you really assert that just because you arranged heavy security and it ended up being bogus, taking precautions was unwarranted? What's the use of criticizing after the fact? Precautions are taken just in case. If nothing happens, it's a happy ending. Isn't that the way it should be?"

Hisui looked greatly unimpressed, his eyes full of derision.

After listening to him, Rangetsu responded aggressively.

"Looks like you have become this half-vampire's dog. Have you been struck by the 'magic eyes'?"

"Eh? Half-vampires can't use the 'magic eyes.' But they do have sharper eyesight than normal humans."

"I was being sarcastic. Are you that dim-witted?"

"Oh my god, there's actually someone who needs to clarify she was being sarcastic? What a total fail."

Hisui covered his mouth and suppressed the urge to laugh.

Rangetsu frowned and summed up with a face of displeasure.

"...In any case, learn from your mistakes. Please think carefully before you act, special consultant Kariya. Although based on my predictions, the higher-ups will be less inclined to listen to your opinion from now on."

Then she led her subordinates and left.

Hisui remained rooted to the spot, watching them with a bored expression.

"...Let us leave. Sorry for troubling you."

Eruru spoke and led Hisui back to ground level.

Along the way back, Hisui carefully selected his words and inquired about what just happened.

"Could it be possible... That you're in a rather complicated position?"

"It has always been this way. The purpose of setting up the Supernatural Investigations Section was to make effective use of cryptids surviving in the modern age. Humans serving under my command are tasked with monitoring me at the same time as assisting me. Oh well, who could blame them for I am the half-vampire inheriting half my ancestry from vampires."

"Don't say that. So who is that Oogami woman supposed to be?"

"Exactly as she introduced herself, an official member of the Supernatural Investigations Section. With several subordinates under her, she can be considered a squad leader. For some reason, she is always trying to compete against me... But she is quite capable in all respects, especially in handling the higher-ups."

"Looks like you're full of sarcasm too. Oh well, I can understand. But I get the impression that back from when I first met you, your authority seems to be higher than that Oogami's. Could it be that... You were disciplined for that particular incident?"

"For my own subordinate to be a vampire, especially one that had sucked human blood? It is only natural that I take responsibility as the leader. By the way, about Kishida's incident, it is very probable that the higher-ups knew he was a vampire and specifically arranged for him to work under me. Were they under the impression that kin could coexist harmoniously?"

Eruru laughed in self-deprecation.

It looked like the incident had hurt her quite a lot.

Despite being the one bearing responsibility, but for the higher-ups to deliberately place a vampire by her side—it would not be strange if she started to hate the world.

"I heard from Sudou already. You put in a great deal of effort to allow Rushella and me to have a normal life. The matter of my constitution... You didn't report it to your superiors, right?"

"Why are you talking about this suddenly? I only do what is within my duty. The current state of affairs is that the higher-ups are taking a policy of leniency towards the amnesiac vampire who has not harmed humans. Besides, the only victim, you, do not actually count as a victim..."

"Granted, but I still haven't expressed my gratitude to you properly. Thank you."

"......"

Walking ahead of him, Eruru began to blush, but Hisui did not notice.

Instead, he changed the subject to something that happened a while ago.

"By the way, about that coffin...... You probably knew there was actually nothing inside, right? But you still called me here just in case?"

"Because I no longer have subordinates working under me... You are the only one I can use. Also......"

"Also?"

Eruru paused halfway through.

She seemed quite hesitant.

"...Because I wanted to hear your opinion. I was certain it was a vampire's coffin, but apart from that, I was wondering if you would discover anything else..."

"Why do you believe in me that much? Isn't this supposed to be your job?"

Saying that, Hisui squeezed ahead to look into Eruru's face—thus causing Eruru to deliver a slap to his face without warning.

Smack, the clear sound of impact echoed through the hallway.

"...Why did you hit me?"

"Shut up. I am sorry for believing in you. How foolish of me."

Without saying anything more, she quickened her pace and walked ahead.

Hisui had no choice but to walk faster to catch up.

"It is indeed a vampire's coffin, I agree. But why was it sunk to the bottom of the sea, heavily wrapped in chains, that I don't get. If it was for sealing a vampire... Wrapping it in chains and throwing it into the sea makes sense. But since it's empty inside, this..."

"...Correct. Regarding the coffin and the sunken ship, investigations will continue. But based on the reactions of the higher-ups just now, progress will be delayed even more. But more importantly......"

"You're trying to say... It's very similar to Rushella's coffin, right? I can't really assert anything right now so I'll wait for the analysis on your side first."

"Please explain to her as quickly as possible. If you were to hide this from her, it will probably result in more trouble. Despite your cleverness, you seem to keep making blunders in this area."

"Yes yes, got it."

Hisui answered in his trademark bored tone of voice. Just as it so happened, they had reached the entrance to the Metropolitan Police Department.

At the same time, his cellphone sounded.

Taking it out for a look, Hisui found a text message from Mei.

...No, judging from the contents... It was quite awkwardly written:

eating kake tuk longr than expected

hurry n pick me up!

"...What's going on? It feels like an elementary schooler sending her first message to her mom......"

"Elementary schoolers these days not only know how to type properly but also use emoticons. If anything, it would be an old lady unused to electronic devices, trying to send a message to her grandson, typing with trembling hands on the new phone she bought... This kind of analogy would be more suitable, right?"

Eruru read the message from beside him and smiled.

Exchanging glances with a smile, they both knew who the sender was.

Although the name said Mei.

In actual fact it was someone else.

Clearly Rushella.

"...She doesn't have a cellphone so she borrowed Sudou's. Should I get her a phone card?"

"I think you ought to give those rare public phone booths a break, for I foresee a terrible fate of destruction for them. By the way, I have no idea if Sudou-san's cellphone survived..."

"Can you write off the replacement costs for me?"

"Keep your fantasies in your dreams, please."

Rejected outright, Hisui resolutely decided his first priority was to pick up the trouble making princess.

"The Tzara Blade is way too heavy... I'm almost out of strength."

"I will send a car. You can use it to pick her up along the way."

"Thanks......"

Just as he thanked Eruru, Hisui felt the onslaught of intense chill.

This bone-chilling, icy cold presence made him brace himself.

"What are you doing so suddenly?"

"Uh, it feels very cold somehow...... Is the air conditioning turned on too strong?"

"This is eco-friendly air conditioning, so the thermostat is set at twenty eight degrees Celsius... Actually, I am feeling slightly hot."

"Really? Why do I feel all cold ever since coming up from underground?"

"Maybe you caught a summer cold? Just as well, tomorrow is Sunday so you should go back and lie down soon."

"Are you my mom? Oh well, whatever, let's hurry and pick her up."

Saying that, Hisui exited the building.

Eruru followed closely behind.

Two people in a series... Or rather, there were three.

One extra.

In this noisy lobby area with so many people coming and going, how many people actually noticed?

Hisui and Eruru were completely unaware, but quite a few people screamed lightly and backed off after looking in their direction.

These people differed in gender, age and appearances. However, they all shared a certain special secret skill that they were not particularly proud of... Rather than skill, it might be more apt to say special ability.

Because they were the only ones able to see.

A girl was following behind Hisui not too far away, dressed in a sailor-style school uniform, her body semi-transparent.

Only people with relatively stronger spiritual senses could perceive—a being that did not exist in the realm of the living.

Chapter 2 - Touko-san

"Iyaaaaaaaaah!!"

A super high decibel shriek resounded through the living room as Rushella clutched and wrapped herself around Hisui's arm tightly.

"Ouch, could you stop that!? You're using brute force all over... Especially on spinach night. If you twist my arm off, how are you going to compensate me!?"

"B-But... That..."

Rushella tearfully protested as she pointed to the television in the living room.

Although the scene had already changed, an instant earlier, the screen was showing a woman dressed in white, climbing out of a television. The penetrating sight and closeup of the bloodshot eye filled the entire screen.

"What on earth was that!?"

"Uh... Isn't that Sadako-san? By the way, if you're scared then don't rent it!"[1]

I can't stand this. Hisui shook his head as looked at the rental DVD box.

On the way home after he picked her up, Rushella became fascinated by a new horror film's poster, so they made a trip to a DVD rental shop in the neighborhood.

Rushella was quite interested in going to a place like that for the first time. Using his own membership card, Hisui rented several DVDs she had picked.

After dinner and a bath, she was dressed as usual in Hisui's uniform shirt. Rushella declared that she wanted to watch a DVD, and so they watched one... This was the result.

"What is with that woman... Whether her eye or her movements, none of them are normal!"

"Uh, that's only natural... Because she's a ghost, you see? By the way, how could a vampire be afraid of horror movies? In addition, I only rented this because you picked it."

"B-But... I never expected something like that to pop out... Oh no, what should I do... I also watched the 'cursed videotape'...... Will be cursed!? Will I also be cursed!? One week from now, will that woman also come knocking on our door!?"

"...As if she's going to come. Even if she did, you can handle it. Yeah, just suck her blood. Drain her dry for sure. Maybe she might even become your servant... But then again, I have no wish to see the birth of vampire Sadako."

"As if I'd bite her!! By the way, how could you be so calm and composed!!?"

Rushella leaned against Hisui and buried her face in his chest to escape her fear.

Her behavior seemed a bit... Or rather, quite adorable. However, Hisui mustered his iron will and turned his head away from her.

"Because I've watched it many times already... Recently, there are a lot of moe-fied versions even."

"Even so......! Seriously, humans are capable of creating such horrifying things......"

"Praise in this area is rather strange. Anyway, I'm going to bed."

Hisui gently pushed aside Rushella's supple body and made his way towards the staircase.

"W-Wait up! Where are you going!?"

"Like I said, I'm going to bed. Ever since the daytime, my body has had this unpleasant feeling and incessant chills. But I don't have a fever, and in fact, my body temperature is lower than usual... What's going on?"

Hisui puzzled over his inexplicable condition as he walked up the stairs.

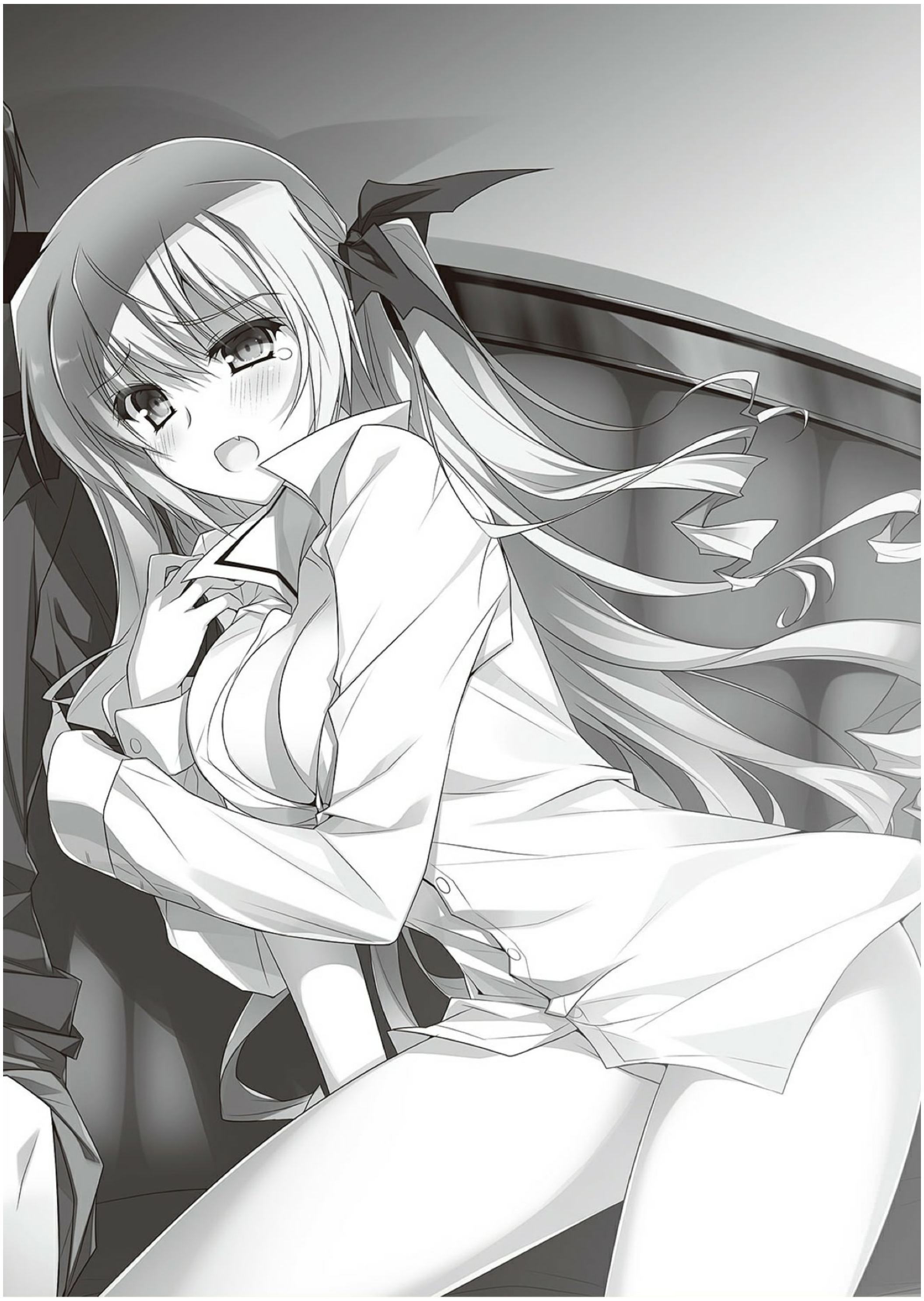
Rushella remained clinging tightly to his arm.

"D-Don't be in such a hurry, okay? It'd be nice for a boy and a girl to chat all night long once in a while❤"

"...Are you trying to reenact a touching reunion of old friends in foreign lands? Although I'm not against friendship between genders, I still can't accept girls as close friends or beyond."

"As if anyone is your friend here! I am the master and you are the servant! Know your proper place!!"

"...Then there's no need to chat all night long. Goodnight~"



Shaking Rushella's arms off him, Hisui returned to his own bedroom.

After repositioning his pillow, he spread out his blanket and got into his steel-frame bed.

Then he laid himself down and switched off the light.

However—

"...By the way, why are you here?"

Hisui grumbled at Rushella.

Because the girl was lying right beside him.

She had burrowed beneath the blanket and was lying face to face with Hisui who was on his side in a fetal position.

"Hmm, after some thought, I realized I was going to suck your blood tomorrow morning anyway."

"Could you stop that!? Stop talking about it as if it were predestined already, okay!? Do you really want me to start Sunday morning all covered in blood!?"

"You're being noisy, so shut up. Since I have to drink your blood anyway, isn't it better to just occupy this spot directly!? Saves me the effort of coming over, killing two birds with one stone!"

Rushella clenched her fist excitedly as if she had suddenly thought of a great idea.

Yeah, it does save a lot of effort.

But there's nothing good about that.

"Say, Rushella-san...... What you said is not wrong...... But you realize... You're going to sleep with me?"

"......Ah."

She finally realized only after Hisui's reminder.

Her face gradually turned red. Then with her long and beautiful leg, she kicked Hisui directly off the bed.

"Y-Y-Y-Y-You lowly bastard, how dare you share a bed with me...... Know your proper place!!"

"You're the one who entered my bed, okay......!!"

Having landed head first on the floor, Hisui angrily glared at Rushella.

But he had zero hope of victory.

Furthermore, it was currently night time.

After calmly assessing the battle situation, Hisui decided on a tactical retreat and left the room.

"Hey, hold it right there, where are you going!?"

"Going anywhere is my freedom, right? I'm not picky about where I sleep. I'm fine with spending a night on the living room sofa."

"W-W-Wait up, don't be in such a hurry!! Sharing a bed is no good... But umm, I can take the bed while you sleep on the floor!"

"As if anyone wants to sleep on the floor! Go ahead if you want to sleep in this bed. But then again, that bed there... Faces the television."

Only after Hisui pointed with his index finger did Rushella discover the television's existence.

This personal, mini LCD television was positioned at just the right height and distance to be viewed comfortably from the bed.

Obviously, there was nothing on the screen right now, but back in the movie, the television would turn on suddenly all by itself, and from the screen came...

"S-Shut up! Move this thing away from me! Why is it in the room!?"

"Hey, I haven't even questioned your being in the room. Oh well, if that thing really crawls out from the television, do your best to handle it. Don't worry, you can win!"

Hisui cheered enthusiastically for her and prepared to leave the room. But Rushella jumped from the bed and grabbed him.

Then hugging Hisui from behind, she immobilized him.

"What the heck are you doing...? Hurry and let me sleep, okay?"

"Not allowed. As long as a single sliver of crimson light remains in my eyes, I shall never let you have your way!"

"What is this? What the heck do you actually want me to do?"

"Oooh... Umm... Ah yes, we still haven't finished watching all the Dee-Wee-Dee's we rented! Come and watch! Let's try a change of flavor. Come watch, come watch!!"

"The rental period is a week, there's plenty of time left... Or maybe you can watch it alone......"

"What does it matter!? Hurry and accompany me!!"

...In the end, she dragged Hisui to the living room and forced him to watch movies with her.

After they placed another DVD into the player, the screen began to play.

At the end—the living room reverberated with a scream again.

"Iyaaaaaaaaah!!"

"...Again, huh."

Rushella wrapped herself tightly around Hisui, causing him to sigh deeply.

"B-Because...... What on earth was that thing? The horrifying woman, all covered in blood, appearing in the big scary house, and then there was even that pale little child, what are they!?"

"Uh...... Isn't that Kayako-san and Toshio-kun? Say, isn't this another horror film!? Didn't you want a change of flavor? Why did you switch to something even more scary!?"[2]

"B-Because I never expected it to be the same genre......"

"...Come on, you should have looked at the packaging beforehand at least."

"On further thought, isn't that house quite similar to this one... Could there be ghosts here as well!? Does this home have those things too!?"

"Don't say something so rude. Even if my home counts as a western house, it's completely different in style. And it has a vampire instead of ghosts. Or rather, it has you in it. I really cannot keep you company any further. My head feels really heavy, and I'm getting crazy chills too......"

Hisui took out the DVD from the player and returned it to its box.

Shutting off the television, he thought he could finally head off to bed, only to hear Rushella scream again.

"...What is it this time?"

"I-In the television! There was a figure in the television just now!!"

"Huh?"

With a skeptical expression, Hisui turned to look at the switched-off television.

"...Eh?"

The television gave off a tiny spark for an instant, as if someone had switched it on.

But nothing showed on the screen and it went dark as it was supposed to.

"Is it broken...? This television shouldn't be that much of an antique."

Confirming again, Hisui stared at the television for a long time but there were no changes.

Although the reflection was not as clear as a mirror, Hisui could see his own face on the screen.

"There really was something! A silhouette of a long-haired girl!!"

"Say, did you watch too many movies?"

"Absolutely not!"

Rushella approached the screen as well to examine closely.

Just as in legends, vampires did not have reflections in mirrors. There was no sign of Rushella on the screen.

Water, windows, walls—no reflective surface was capable of producing an image of a vampire.

"If anything, I find your lack of a reflection on this surface even more scary. There's no figure here, right?"

"There really was one just now......"

Rushella pouted, displeased.

Just as Hisui shrugged skeptically, the floorboards creaked.

Creak, creak... They clearly heard sounds of someone walking across the floor.

"W-What is this noise!? Could there be... Someone here!?"

"How could there be anyone? After all, the house is quite old... Probably something's too old and need repairs."

"Really......?"

Rushella asked half-believingly. A great noise suddenly came from the kitchen.

"W-What now?"

"Probably some plates fell on the floor. Isn't it all because you're making a loud commotion here? Judging from the noise, nothing probably broke. I'll go check it out."

"W-Wait up. Don't leave me!"

Rushella hugged Hisui tightly, pressing him down on the sofa.

Then in order to seal all avenues of escape, she secured his hands firmly behind his back, immobilizing Hisui's body.

"What the heck are you doing? It hurts a lot, I can't move......"

"I have a bad feeling...... Something in this house, there must be something!"

"...Are you a paranormal expert from some sort of occult show? It's just a noise and some plates falling, right? If watching horror movies causes supernatural events, then wouldn't all of Japan be in a total mess?"

"It is completely unrelated. I am simply saying I sensed something bad. I-In any case... Don't even think of leaving me alone tonight......"

Saying that, Rushella curled up and pressed herself even tighter against Hisui.

It looked like she really sensed a presence that Hisui could not feel. But undeniably, it was partially influenced by the movies.

"...I thought you forbade sharing the same bed?"

"I-I can grant special privileges too! So long as you don't get any strange ideas. Just stay there obediently and don't move!"

"What the heck. You're treating me as a body pillow now!?"

Unfortunately, vampires were exceptionally strong at night. Hisui could not escape even if he wanted to.

Just as Hisui pondered on how to handle being pressed beneath her weight... He spontaneously heard steady breathing noises.

"Hey... Rushella-san......."

No answer.

Looking down, he found the vampire using his chest as her pillow, having drifted peacefully off to the land of dreams.

Her powerful grip restraining him had probably relaxed, so breaking free should be rather easy... But Hisui abandoned the notion.

Were he to accidentally wake her up, he would be bringing doom upon himself... More importantly, her sleeping face was far too charming.

There was no longer any trace of her noisy fussing and arrogance. Embracing Hisui, the girl was breathing peacefully.

She seemed to be finding this body pillow very comfortable, for her face was filled with delight and reassurance.

"......This is totally cheating."

Hisui protested lightly. Then he dutifully acted the part of his master's body pillow.

Several hours later—

Or rather, when morning came.

"Ouch—!!"

Hisui felt a sharp pain on his neck as usual, causing him to jump up.

Or rather, before he could actually get up, a supple body weighed him down.

"(Good morning.)"

With the fear from last night having disappeared from her heart, Rushella's face was radiant as she bit his neck, sucking his blood away.

"Damn it, is this how you repay me for letting you rest against me!? My head hurts enough already...!"

"What does it matter anyway!? By the way, drinking blood as soon as I open my eyes in the morning turns out to be really great. How about we sleep together from now on!?"

"Uh, that, let's not...... Hey, hurry up and stop it! Don't drink anymore!!"

"(You're being noisy, so shut up!)"

Hence, Rushella continued to enjoy her blood drinking time.

With the sharp pain on his neck as his daily alarm clock, thus Kujou

Hisui's Sunday began.

"...And so, the ghost farce persists to this week?"

"...Yeah. The symptoms aren't really visible during the daytime, but all hell breaks loose at night."

After school on Monday, Hisui was killing time in the "club classroom" again.

Mei was sitting by his side, listening to him recount Rushella's ghost farce that started with the horror movies.

"A vampire being scared of horror movies and fearful of ghosts, come on...... Are you really a 'True Ancestor'?"

"Shut up, it's completely the fault of the humans who make these things! It's even more terrifying than real ghosts and supernatural creatures! And those 'nukular weapon' they talk about on television, why do humans create these terrifying things that could destroy themselves!?"

Occupying Hisui's other side, Rushella cried out angrily.

Eruru and Kirika had not arrived yet so the trio were the only ones in the room.

"I'd never expect you to bring up such a serious topic. I guess I count as a product of humans' endless desire, so I'm not really in a position to comment. But what's up with ghosts?"

"It's not a farce, okay? It really exists! Just look at Hisui's appearance and you'll see!"

Rushella pointed at Hisui.

Indeed, he currently did look a little off.

With dark circles under his eyes, his face was also quite haggard.

"You do look a bit ill... Did you catch a cold or get heat stroke?"

"No, I don't have either... No fever, but just feeling chills. No appetite but I don't feel nauseous either... In any case, I just feel lethargic and cold."

"Isn't this simply because you sucked his blood? You must have accidentally drained too much, causing him anemia, it must be that, right?"

Mei asked in accusatory tones.

She already disapproved of Rushella. Seeing her beloved's health threatened, she put on a very strict expression.

"...I haven't drank since Sunday morning. And it was the usual amount... Besides, if the reason lies in blood loss, this condition would have happened before, right?"

"...Yeah. I also don't think it's Rushella's fault. But I don't think it's related to ghosts either."

"Like I said, there really is one! When the class rep looked at Hisui, didn't she go pale in the face and started praying with her cross!? It made me so uncomfortable!!"

"Then why don't you simply perform last rites to help the ghost pass on? Or better yet, let's just drive a wooden stake into that damn enormous bosom of yours?"

"You're being noisy, shut up! You count as a supernatural creature, right? Don't tell me you feel nothing at all!?"

"Sigh, haven't we gone over this already? If anything, I'm closer to the scientific side... Supernatural senses or whatever, totally zero. 'A woman's intuition' is hard enough to come by already, I'm not going to be greedy for some so-called sixth sense."

"...So foolish of me, to think I'd place my hopes in you."

"What? Oh, however... I probably do feel something. Hey, Hi-kun, let me have a good look at your face."

"Don't go giving him a surprise kiss, okay?"

"...Of course not. Hurry and let me have a look at your face from the side."

"...Like this?"

Baffled, Hisui turned his head to show Mei his profile.

Mei leaned over and Hisui did not take precautions. After all, with his profile towards her, even if she kissed... It would simply be a kiss on the cheek.

Then Mei came even closer.

Her breath against his ear felt rather ticklish.

And... It really was way too close.

"Umm......."

By the time Hisui realized something was off, it was too late.

Bite.

"...Eh?"

A sweet, wet sensation unexpectedly attacked his earlobe.

Before he could resist, Mei's lips, teeth and tongue had already captured Hisui firmly.

It felt like only an instant—that seemed to persist for several minutes.

As soon as Mei's moistness left Hisui's earlobe, he collapsed silently.

"W-What's with you, Hisui?"

Rushella hastily rushed over.

With Hisui's head in the way just now, she did not see what Mei was doing.

But Hisui's dazed expression alerted her to the truth.

"My earlobe was being sucked...... Then bitten as well...... Also licked..."

"Pull yourself together! What kind of delusional nonsense are you talking about!?"

"I was being teased, toyed with, made wet, then a tongue was inserted there... And..."

"Hurry up and pull yourself together! Stay rational!"

"Don't look at me... Don't look at my filthy self......"

Hisui whispered softly.

Despite his words, his face displayed a hint of delight.

"No one will marry me anymore... My ear, it's reached adulthood... Climbed all the way to the fifth level......"

Hisui muttered nonstop, then fell over on the spot.

A face full of bliss.

"Bitch, what on earth did you do to him!? And he was already so weak to begin with...!!"

"Oh dear, I pitied him for always being a certain someone's drink and chewtoy, so I bit him lightly and gently. Now you see the power of the 'Sweet Bite of Seduction' performed by combining the perfect lovedoll with Sudou Mei-sama's forty eight functions of pleasure? My tongue is even more nimble than the comedian Okada's, you know?"[3]

"GRRRRRRR......!"

Rushella could not find any words to retort, especially after seeing Hisui still lost in ecstasy.

He was clearly enjoying it more than having his blood sucked by a vampire.

"If you can't accept this then how about you try biting Hi-kun's earlobe? If you don't even know how to bite lightly, then you're worse than cats and dogs, right!?"

"GRRRRRRR—!"

Taunted by Mei, Rushella approached Hisui's ear.

His dripping wet ear was still red when Rushella's crimson lips made contact.

Then with a flash, pristine white fangs appeared.

Steeling her determination, Rushella opened her mouth.

Bite.

"OWWWWW—!!"

Holding his ear, Hisui jumped straight up.

"What are you doing so suddenly!? Mercilessly biting me in a sensitive spot... I've never had ear piercings before and here you go making a hole in my ear directly!"

"I'm so glad... You're back to your senses, right!?"

"What kind of shock therapy is this!? It's like having one's ear picked and then suddenly splashed with cold water on the face. Totally kills the aftertaste. How terrible can you get!?"

"Arara, was my sweet bite really that pleasurable?"

Mei licked her lips seductively, causing Hisui to shyly scratch his head.

"Why are you making such a shameless expression!? As my servant, show some dignity!!"

Saying that, Rushella prepared to unleash her fists.

As the daily beating performance was just about to begin, the classroom's door opened.

Eruru and Kirika entered.

Seeing the state of the classroom, they both frowned. Eruru was the first to voice her disapproval.

"You people are so noisy. Another argument huh... What is this!?"

"We could hear your voices from the corridor. Don't forget this is an unofficial club, can't you pay more attention...!?"

As soon as they stepped into the classroom, Eruru and Kirika instantly looked nervous.

Then Eruru took out her favorite sacred gun "Argentum" while Kirika brought out a potion bottle with a skull sign from her breast pocket.

"Hey... What are you two doing so suddenly!?"

"Why are Eru-chan and Senpai filled with murderous intent!?"

"What are you two intending to do!?"

Ignoring their doubts, the two girls remained armed.

Eruru and Kirika cautiously approached Hisui's group then pointed their weapons as they spoke.

"Haven't any of you noticed...?"

Eruru asked with her gun barrel directed at Hisui.

Her eyes were not joking.

The way she looked, she really would pull the trigger if necessary.

"Hey, calm down... This is a school, don't do anything crazy!"

Hisui raised his arms to surrender, indicating he had neither weapons nor hostility, but Eruru did not lower her guard.

"...Looks like you people really can't see it. Kariya-san, may I handle this?"

Kirika sighed and stepped forward.

Still holding the gun, Eruru nodded. Her eyes were still locked on Hisui.

"Senpai, why is your expression so scary......"

"It's okay, just wait and stay still."

Kirika took out another bottle and splashed its liquid contents on Hisui, Rushella and Mei's heads.

The transparent liquid turned into mist, spreading into the surroundings, causing their vision to blur.

"You witch, what was that for!?"

Kirika ignored Rushella's protest and began to softly chant some sort of language with a mysterious expression.

Hisui and Rushella could tell that the sentences were composed of Latin and Old English, but the meaning and grammar were completely lost on them.

It was likely a language unique to witches, directed towards otherworldly existences—in other words, a so-called "incantation."

Catalysts, incantations, combined with Kirika's magical powers, it formed a simple "ritual."

Although the act was quick and concise, it produced a pronounced effect on the surroundings.

"Why do I feel a bit cold...?"

Apart from Hisui who had been feeling cold for the past few days, even Mei was hugging herself and shivering.

It felt like a sudden drop in temperature—so sudden that even the air next to their skin felt slightly warm.

"Senpai, what on earth did you do to us......"

—Can you hear me......?

" " "......!?" " "

Hisui, Rushella and Mei looked at each other with surprise.

A girl was whispering softly in their ears.

But the voice did not come from anyone present.

"Someone is... here?"

Hisui voiced the question the trio held as he surveyed the surroundings.

Naturally, there was no one else around.

Only Eruru and Kirika standing on the side mysteriously.

The pair sighed and pointed at Hisui's chest.

"You still haven't noticed?"

?—The trio all turned their gaze at Hisui's chest.

And were shocked.

Because there was another head growing out of his chest.

Striking, long, black hair with the bangs cut uniformly. The hair dangling in front blocked her gaze, shrouding her expression—but this was a girl's head, with extremely pale complexion.

Her skin—really was too white.

It gave a sense of transparency, actually this was not a metaphor—Because she really was half-transparent.

One could see the floorboards through her. The outline of her face also quivered unsteadily.

The head smiled at the trio whose faces had turned pale.

"Finally, you can see me."

" " "Yaaaaaah—!!" " "

The trio screamed loudly all at once, falling from their chairs.

Instead of getting up, they backed off while remaining sitting on the ground.

The head also fell out naturally from Hisui's chest.

Or rather than fall, it passed through.

Passing through Hisui, she remained curled up in the same spot in contrast to Hisui who was retreating as quickly as he could.

"W-What is that thing!?"

Rushella hugged Hisui's arm as she pointed to the object.

Because Hisui had backed off, the full appearance was now visible.

Rather than just a single head... It was clearly a girl's body.

A slender body dressed in a sailor style school uniform that was slightly out of fashion. It looked so intangible because it really was half transparent... Her outline blended with the surrounding environment.

"...Could that really be?"

Hisui asked with a stiff expression and Eruru nodded.

"Indeed, this is what is known as a ghost."

"Really!?"

Hisui exclaimed reflexively, his face all pale. Only then did he notice the girl's movements.

She was coming towards him... Crawling on all fours.

Step by step...... Reaching out with her slender arms, she approached.

"H-Hey Sudou, hurry up and think of something!"

"U-Umm, I am on the side of science, I can't do anything about something immune to physical attacks... You hurry and think of something!"

"I-I'm no good against this sort of thing either! I don't even know if the magic eyes work or not...!!"

The two supernatural entities were completely useless.

As they pushed responsibility onto each other, the girl had already crawled to Hisui's feet as he sat collapsed on the floor.

"H-Hey wait... Don't get worked up, don't bring your curse over here!"

"..."

Instead of answering, the girl slowly pressed her face near.

The trio remained rooted to the spot.

As the girl approached, her face gradually entered their view clearly.

Beneath those bangs, the face—

"...Hmm?"

Hisui was surprised. Rushella and Mei also looked at each other.

He cautiously approached the girl's face, inhaled—and sighed:

"So cute......"

Instantly, the vampire and the artificial human's iron fists pummeled him from left and right in a pincer attack.

"Ouch, what are you two doing!?"

"Shut up, to think you'd lust after a ghost!?"

"That's right, leaving me alone, running off to shack up with a ghost huh!?"

"I'm just expressing my sincere impression! And in actual fact, it is much better than you two deadly hazards!!"

"What did you say!? I simply suck a bit of blood and order you around arbitrarily!!"

"All I want is to have a baby to build a happy family, that's all!!"

"Isn't that enough? You girls are already way worse than typical family violence!!"

The trio instantly began a war of words.

Seeing them about to start a protracted engagement, the girl raised her hand weakly.

"Excuse me...... Are you all ready to listen to me?"

" " "Ah——!?" " "

Glaring at the interloper, the trio's eyes looked like that of gangsters or ruffians.

"I-I'm sorry......"

The girl shrank back in fright.

Even though she was clearly a ghost.

Fiddling with her fingers, unsure of what to do, she cast a pleading look for help towards the duo behind her.

Eruru and Kirika nodded with an expression of deep understanding. Then Eruru was the first to take action.

"Can you control yourselves? Her situation must be quite difficult."

" " "Ah——!?" " "

Without saying another word, Eruru stuffed the barrel of the sacred gun "Argentum" into Hisui's mouth.

"(My bad...)"

"Very well. So, Miss Ghost...... Would you like to start?"

"Y-Yes......"

Despite Eruru's assistance, the girl seemed shocked instead.

—Several minutes later, the girl was standing before the blackboard like a transfer student in front of Hisui and the group, her head bowed down lightly.

"Umm... Let's start with a greeting, nice to meet you all for the first time, my name is Fuwa Touko. Uh, my hobby is reading back when I was alive, skills... I guess it'd be literary activities. Recently... I mean after I died...... I've taken an interest in observing humans... Or rather, I can't do anything apart from that... Skills... Hmm... Does causing supernatural phenomenon count? Well, because I can't touch objects directly, I have to move them with my thoughts..."

"Let me interrupt here, why is this self-introduction so dark!? Ah, come to think of it... You possessed me earlier!?"

"Hmm, I didn't plan on possessing you, I just followed you, right? I called you many times but you didn't seem to hear. Then I tried to make you notice, so I made noises and moved objects in your surroundings......"

"So it really was your doing......! Trying to scare us... But why couldn't we see you until now?"

Rushella began to ponder.

Kirika sighed and explained for her.

"The ability to see ghosts and sense their existence totally varies from person to person. Even people who are described as having strong spiritual senses do not necessarily detect all kinds of souls. This is related to a complicated interplay of wavelength, compatibility and time spent together, hence one cannot assert the same for all cases. Having undergone a certain type of training, Kariya-san and I can see ghosts with a bit of concentration. The way I see it, the fact that you fail to see ghosts despite being a vampire is quite surprising, yes?"

"...So annoying, shut up. I simply failed to see with my eyes, that's all! But I sensed it from the start! And now it's because of your spell that I can see it?"

"Yes. For an analogy, it's like I adjusted the antenna to receive electromagnetic waves? Like a bike without training wheels, once you start seeing her, this Touko-san here will not disappear from your sight anymore. By the way... Why did you choose to possess Kujou-kun?"

Touko herself did not know the answer to this basic question.

"You ask why? ...But actually he's the one who approached me... And he even came to my side."

"...Could you be referring to...... That coffin?"

"That's right......"

"Wait a minute, what coffin is this?"

Rushella interrogated Hisui in surprise.

"You mean on Saturday? The vampire coffin dredged up from the sea?"

Mei carelessly disclosed a secret.

"Ah, it's the one that greatly resembles Draculea-san's coffin. So what happened afterwards?"

Kirika inquired Eruru out of sheer curiosity.

"...What is this about? Great, you're hiding something from me again!?"

Rushella grabbed Hisui and questioned.

"This... Uh, that..."

Hisui looked towards Eruru for help but she did not even glance at him, typing away on her notebook computer, declaring indifferently:

"I reminded you earlier to explain things beforehand. You brought this on yourself."

"...Since she said so already, then give me a proper explanation, okay...?"

"......Yes."

After listening to Hisui's explanation, Rushella looked at Touko again.

"...Then this means you were residing in the coffin all this time?"

She asked the ghost. Also, Hisui's fate of being beaten up after the inquisition needed no mentioning.

"Yes... I've always been... Together with the coffin. Although I can't recall the memories during the time at the bottom of the sea... But I feel...... Like I've always been together with it."

Touko searched her memories as she murmured.

Like her semi-transparent body, her tone of voice was quite vague and intangible.

"...Then you left the coffin and followed Hi-kun. Isn't this the case of... Going to a paranormal site, and getting possessed by a spirit...... So-called compatible wavelengths?"

Mei commented casually.

Touko nodded and recalled her first encounter with Hisui—although Hisui was completely unaware at the time.

"I feel like... That must be the case. I saw him approach the coffin and felt that he might possibly discover me. But he ended up not noticing..."

Touko looked wistfully at Hisui.

Although it was an adorably shy look, her gaze was a bit penetrating.

After all, she was capable of causing paranormal phenomenon, which could very well be a cursed power.

"...So, could you stop staring at me? I feel like, umm, it's a bit scary... In fact, I've been feeling quite unwell, getting chills all over......"

"The key is willpower and getting used to it. It'll get better with time. If she was malevolent, you could be possessed, cursed and killed in a worst case scenario."

"...Senpai, that doesn't count as comforting. Uh, so, Touko-san?"

"Calling me Touko is fine......"

"Umm, Touko-san...... Why were you together with the coffin? That is undoubtedly a vampire's coffin. But you... Resided in it. Why is that? Also, what did you want to tell me?"

Touko did not answer.

Even though she had possessed Hisui for this purpose, she still did not answer.

The ghost lightly lifted the hair on her right side and pushed it behind her ear.

Then leaning over, she displayed her neck to everyone.

"......!?"

Hisui could not help but stand up. The others stared with their eyes wide.

On her semi-transparent, intangible neck—there was a wound.

Pierced by two holes.

Clearly it was a bite mark.

Proof of a vampire's "kiss."

The ugly wound caused Hisui to narrow his eyes and ask softly.

"You... Were bitten by?"

"This is probably... My cause of death. I was bitten by a vampire and died. It must be the coffin's owner, furthermore... He still exists in this world."

"In other words, he has not been destroyed huh......"

"I don't know......"

"......?"

"He was in the coffin back then. Supposed to be... Locked inside. He could not have escaped from the ocean. However, by the time I regained consciousness, the coffin was empty, just as you all saw with your own eyes."

"...Indeed. So what you wanted to tell me... was this matter? You want me to exterminate the vampire who bit you, to avenge you?"

"I already... Don't care anymore. After all, I'm already dead."

"......"

"I do hate that vampire very much, but revenge would be meaningless. On the other hand, if he is left alone, there will be more victims. So please, stop him......!"

Her voice was filled with sorrow.

Having lost her body, the girl was unable to cause vibrations in the air. Instead, her voice entered the listener's mind directly.

Even having lost her life, in order to prevent new tragedies from happening, she slumbered at the bottom of the sea together with the coffin.

Then what should the living do within their capability?

Hisui spoke and ended the heavy silence.

"Why... choose me? Perhaps if the wavelengths are incompatible, you can't communicate these words, but aren't those people around the coffin from the Supernatural Investigations Section a better choice? Given enough time, people should begin to notice you. Like Kariya here right now."

"Perhaps... You are right. Those people around the coffin, I could sense they are experts from their aura. However, as soon as I saw you... I felt it."

"...Felt what?"

"I would be fine following this person... That's the kind of feeling I got."

"...I'm sorry but that doesn't make me happy at all. By 'following this person,' you actually mean possessing me, right?"

"Don't look at me like that..."

Touko blushed and turned her gaze away.

Seeing her act like that, the girl faction began to cast gazes of derision at Hisui.

"You playboy! Womanizing everywhere, you're planning to cast me aside again!?"

"If you're going to shack up with a ghost, then having a baby with an artificial human is not a problem, right?"

"Going after anything and anyone, driven by your lustful hunger, this is surely a sore sight. What are you planning to do with someone dead?"

"...I didn't know Kujou-kun was this kind of person......"

Despite being separate factions normally, the four girls acted with surprising unity during times like these.

Hisui already had no chance of winning against any single one of them, let alone all four united.

"No no, this is very strange, okay!? I'm the victim here! I was the one being possessed!"

"You don't... want me?"

Touko fiddled with her fingers as she looked up at Hisui.

She really was adorable.

Although semi-transparent.

"Ah, I think with your bangs covering your face, you really capture the Sadako feel! Isn't begging the beginning signs of an evil spirit!?"

"I originally wondered if you would discover me earlier if I used spiritual powers to insert myself into a movie. But you only have DVDs in your home so I couldn't do anything about that. When I was alive, there were only VHS tapes, I don't understand these DVD things."

"Say, please don't make cursed DVDs appear for real in this world. Otherwise we'd need to have an exorcism. By the way... Is this fine for you? There's a vampire here, a kin of the one who killed you..."

"But this boy here is my servant, you know?"

Rushella pointed proudly at Hisui.

Despite Hisui's displeasure, he knew his objections would be met with retribution ten fold, so he gave up.

Furthermore, the current issue needed to be discussed clearly first.

The girl was killed by a vampire and still searching for that vampire after her death. How would she view other vampires and their servants?

"Oh right... I was quite surprised to begin with, for I never expected the person I possessed to have a vampire in his house."

"Excuse me, could you please stop using the term 'possessed'? It sounds really scary."

"But then... It doesn't matter. The person I possessed is a vampire's servant. That's all."

"Say, could you please stop that? Can you stop talking like this is some kind of pure story of love!? If anything, it's more like a stalker?"

"Also... Despite having his blood sucked over a long period, he shows no signs of turning into a vampire at all. Unlike me, he doesn't have a wound on his neck. During the period of possession, I seemed to have heard a term called 'constitution'......"

"Now you're using the term 'period of possession' directly. Oh well, that is the type of constitution I have. And Rushella... How should I put it? She's a bit different from the vampire you encountered, she doesn't go attacking people randomly."

"...Seems like it. Different from the vampire I am searching for. So... If you can assist me, I would be really grateful. Please help me!"

Hearing the girl's pleas again, Eruru spoke up solemnly while she continued to face the computer screen.

"Fuwa Touko... I have found this name in the school's register ten years ago. Gone missing as a first year student—in light of the incident back then with many girls gone missing, people suspected a criminal was responsible, and the police mobilized a lot of manpower... But to no avail."

"I remember this uniform she is wearing. There are records in the student council office and it looks just like our school's old uniform. Although you were younger than me back then, I think I should call you Senpai now."

Kirika murmured with a complicated expression.

"I have also seen your name before, Senpai. On the back page of that little booklet earlier. The Occult Research Club's booklet—your name was written on the back page."

Hisui and Rushella turned to look at each with surprise.

The unofficial hobby group that once existed in this school—the Occult Research Club.

Back then, the students in the hobby group were fascinated with the study of "witches." Getting caught up in it, Hisui almost died and Rushella suffered much.

After the incident came to a close, there were still many unsolved mysteries regarding the Occult Research Club.

The people involved were no longer at the school, while the lowest ranked member—Hisui's homeroom teacher—did not understand the details of the situation back then.

"Touko-san... Were you really a member of the Occult Research Club?"

"—Yes. Back then, we... Must have gone too far. In the beginning, we were just playing with little spells and fortune telling because it was fun. But then... It became serious after that. There was a child who understood these things very well back then. If only it had stayed that way."

Touko lowered her gaze with a lonely feeling.

The remnants of her youth were, at the same time, tragic memories.

"Before we knew it, we had lost all sense of fear. Forgotten the nature of non-human beings. We did not fear the supernatural. Which was why when he showed up, we approached him unwarily. Then... I became like this."

Touko laughed and pointed at her semi-transparent body.

Naturally, no one else could laugh.

"You really should laugh here... I feel worse if you guys make that kind of face."

"...N-No, I can't laugh. Alone at the bottom of the ocean... Ten years gone by in a flash? And still trying hard for the sake of others? How could

I possibly laugh at someone like that?"

Hearing Hisui's serious words, Touko remained smiling.

Everyone present knew that her current smile did not come from the heart.

"Hmm, it seems like the story is pretty much done, so let me, the club president, make a decision."

Rushella crossed her arms and stepped forward magnificently.

Touko seemed to react to her use of the term 'club president.'

"Club president... Eh, everyone is gathered here for club activities? Are you actually making an occult research club as well? I think it's better if you give up... I don't want to see others ending up like me."

"No! This club is for searching for my memories and raising my quality of life. We are called the 'Supernatural Investigations Club'!"

"Anyway, you'd better reconsider the club's name first."

Ignoring Hisui's snide comment, Rushella stared at the horrible wound on Touko's neck.

"What a messy wound. One could tell from its shape how lowly that guy was. Treating prey carefully, to politely add to my race or to bestow eternal slumber of peace—that is the proper etiquette of my race. This guy not only gave up after drinking halfway but even went as far to leave such an ugly wound after death. What a complete disgrace! As a 'True Ancestor,' I must restore the honor of my race!"

"...You mean you're willing to help me?"

"Indeed! For the most part, it'll be Hisui and those other insignificant club members who'll be working their hardest for your sake!"

" " " "You're participating as well!" " " "

Ignoring the retorts of the entire club, Rushella extended her hand towards Touko.

"Humans apparently do this often."

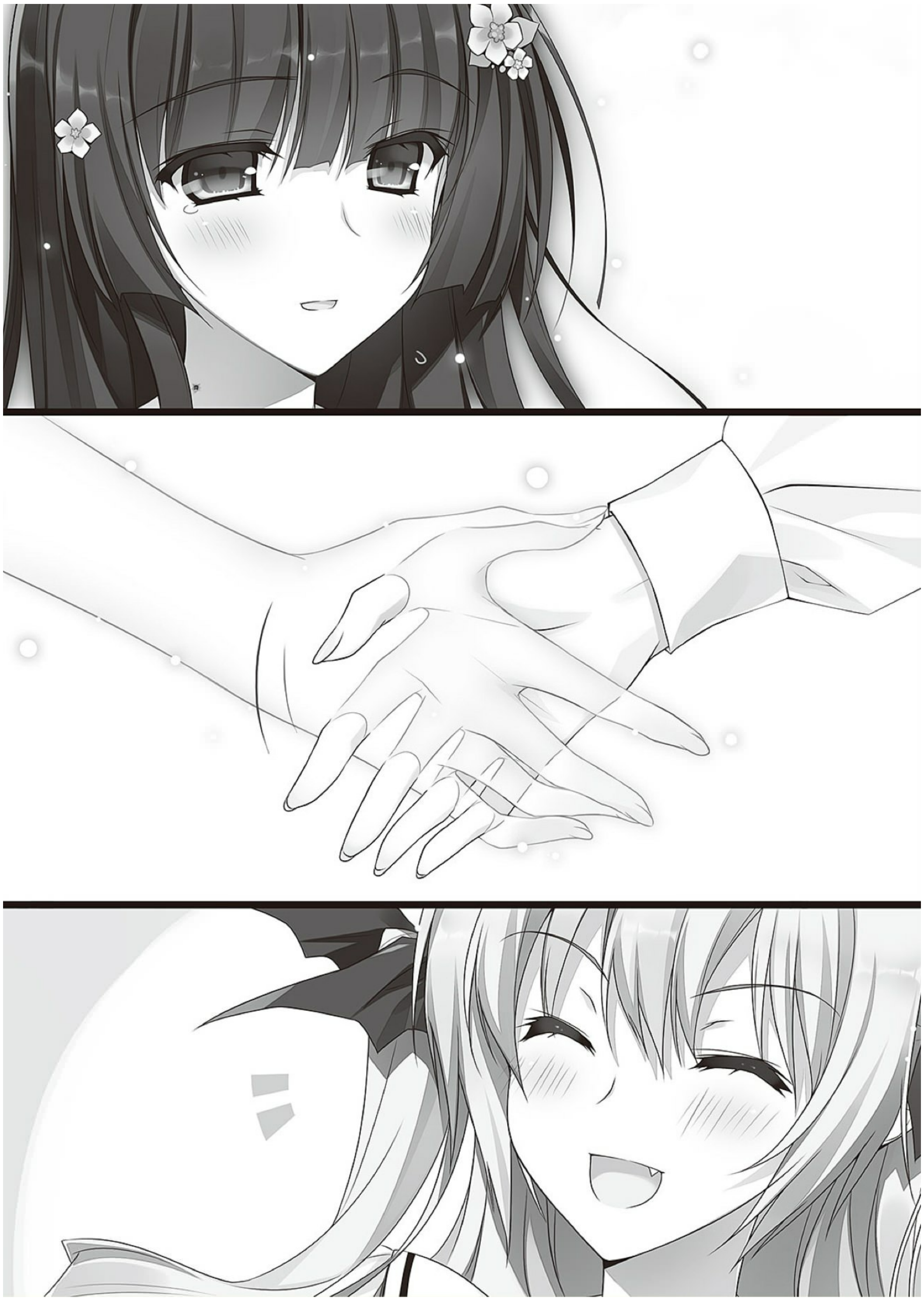
"...That's right. Well then, thank you everyone."

Touko smiled lightly and reached out... But could not grasp Rushella's hand.

Because she passed right through.

Amidst the awkward atmosphere, only Rushella remained smiling cluelessly.

"Leave everything to me! I will surely help you catch that vampire!"



Translator's Notes and References:

1. Sadako-san: the ghost antagonist featured in the Ring horror franchise.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadako_Yamamura

2. Kayako-san and Toshio-kun: a pair of vengeful ghosts (mother and child respectively back when they were alive), from the Ju-on(呪怨) horror franchise.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ju-on_(franchise)

3. Comedian Okada(岡田): a Japanese comedic celebrity.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masumi_Okada

Chapter 3 - Summer Training Camp

A bus was currently driving along a highway along the shore.

This public bus route normally had few passengers and was running on a very infrequent schedule, on the verge of being scrapped. However, the back row of the bus was exceptionally lively today.

An androgynous youth was accompanied by four outstanding beauties—no, more accurately, there were five.

"You sure about the destination? Is your memory accurate?"

"Yes, the place I met him was definitely the beach ahead."

Had there been any other passengers nearby, surely they would have have felt surprised by Hisui's conversation—or rather, his apparent mutterings to himself.

Sitting on the end of the back row seats, Hisui was currently speaking to the empty window seat beside him.

The vacant space there was just enough for one person to sit.

The content of the conversation seemed shallow and meaningless, but that was not the case for Hisui and the others.

Naturally, the one sitting in the empty seat was Touko.

Apart from Hisui's entourage, no one could see her. Making use of Hisui and friends' holiday, Touko was leading them to the beach near Seidou City.

According to her, the members of the Occult Research Club she participated in before—those girls—had first met the vampire here.

Why did Hisui's whole group come? Tracing the cause would require an explanation starting with club president Rushella's "interrogation."

The vampire who had appeared ten years ago, Touko's death, the mystery of the coffin—In order to clarify all this, the first thing they did was to question Touko herself in detail.

Hence, Rushella decided to begin an investigation. In her own words, the "interrogation" commenced immediately.

Then for some reason, Hisui was ordered to take notes with his back towards the girls.

"Hey, the composition of this scene is very strange. I'm sure you're being influenced by those police detective movies. Besides, doesn't Kariya have a computer, so what I'm doing is completely unnecessary? Can't I join the observing team?"

"You're being noisy so shut up! This 'interrogation' is absolutely essential! So hurry and call that Touko whatever... For thorough questioning. If there's a need, order some 'takeout food.' This girl here can prepare snacks for tea!"

Rushella pointed to Kirika as she spoke.

As a side note, Kirika and Mei were standing on the sidelines, observing from a safe distance.

"Hey, what kind of rubbish are you talking about? The interrogation you described sounds so Shouwa era from the last century... And even if you order katsu-don takeout, Touko-san can't..."

She can't eat it because she's a ghost... Feeling that such a statement would be inappropriate, Hisui swallowed his words.

But Touko herself smiled with shining eyes.

"Well, even if I can't eat it, but if you bring it up to me, there's a kind of... satisfying feeling. Probably what's called getting full just by watching? Back when I was alive, I never understood how offerings presented to gods at shrines worked, but now that I'm dead, I seem to get it. When the dead receive offerings from loved ones visiting their graves, they must be very happy, I suppose?"

"...I see."

Seeing her bright smile, Hisui gave up on ridiculing Rushella.

His impression of ghosts was also completely overturned.

"Then there's the vampire who bit you. Where did you run into him?"

The way the interrogation was going nowhere was probably making Eruru impatient, so she posed her own question.

Touko became serious and returned to the main topic.

"The first time... It was night time at a beach. We lied to others and called it a group study session... But ran out there for a gathering. Although there was no clear purpose... Because all our parents were quite strict, perhaps we just wanted to rebel and go on an adventure. That probably explains our enthusiasm with the occult. Then... We met him. His appearance... I can't remember clearly anymore. But he should have been quite handsome. Everyone approached him as if mesmerized......."

"Your group was probably under the mystic eyes' control. Since you are a ghost, vagueness in memory cannot be helped. If ghosts kept their sanity and remembered with clarity their memories from when they were alive, things would not be so troublesome. Not to mention, there is the mystic eyes' effect as well. So... What happened next?"

"...He taught us many things, such as about magic, about supernatural creatures, all sorts... Back then, I only thought that he happened to be familiar with this subject, but thinking about it now, it must've been because he's a vampire. Occult phenomena, he could cause them at will... Everyone was enamored with him. Then one by one, they went missing..."

Touko's recollections prompted Hisui to recall something from a few days ago.

The students who used to be core members of the Occult Research Club all had unknown whereabouts. Gone missing, transferred to a different school, dropped out—Although the cases were not all confirmed, if Touko's story was true, very likely, they had all been bitten without exception.

"For a vampire living in the modern world, adhering to ancient rituals is quite hard, which requires feeding on victims one at a time between intervals of several days. The risks of discovery are quite high and if he does not want to keep descendents, killing them off produces corpses. And hiding corpses takes effort. However, the higher ranking a vampire, the more obstinately they adhere to these rituals. He probably relied on the mystic eyes' mental control to make the girls gradually withdraw from society. It must have taken him quite a lot of troublesome arrangements."

Based on her investigation of the club's core members, combined with her own existing knowledge, Eruru offered her deductions regarding the vampire.

Touko nodded in agreement.

"I believe... It should be like that. Before I knew it, among all the people who met him at the beach, I was the only one left. Not that I'm narcissistic... But I think he liked me best. That's why he saved me for last... When he was about to suck my blood, this was what he said."

The classroom was filled with a heavy, somber atmosphere.

Asking a dead person about her experiences during her last moments—Was there anything more insensitive and cruel than that?

Everyone present understood the fear suffered by those who had been bitten by vampires.

Moreover, this was a powerless girl of their own age group.

Even Eruru was at a loss for words.

In order to seek the truth, Hisui spoke up to shoulder the responsibility.

"Then... What was it like when you were bitten? In other words, the circumstances of your death, Touko-san. Could you also tell us about how you sealed the vampire into the coffin?"

Everyone turned to look at Hisui.

They had all been hesitating over whether to speak out, but someone needed to ask the first question. Hisui stepped forward to take on the role.

After a brief moment of silence, Touko continued.

"......He invited me. He asked if I wanted to visit the beach. He had a boat prepared and asked if I wanted to go for a boat ride..."

"A vampire date on a boat huh? Inviting you even though he clearly fears water, he must be either an utterly ignorant fool or quite a high level vampire. Then you accepted, Touko-san?"

"I was not being controlled by him. Of course, I was probably influenced to some extent... My companions were gone, I smelled something fishy going on. Probably out of a sense of self-preservation, I was able to resist. Later on, I found out he was a vampire, so I...!"

"You deliberately accepted the invitation, hoping to avenge your friends... Yes?"

Touko nodded.

In order to seek vengeance for her friends, the brave girl challenged the vampire—However, reality was harsh and unforgiving.

"I made many preparations, such as plain wooden stakes and a cross. However, he snatched them away and threw them into the sea... Then he sucked my blood. My consciousness became hazy, and gradually... could not resist. However, even so... I summoned my last remaining strength and pounced at him! Then he......"

Touko hugged herself tightly.

The image of the vampire, carved into her eyes just before she died.

The mocking laughter, viewing humans with disdain.

His handsome face was filled with derisive mirth as he stared at her.

"He was completely nonchalant. As I crashed towards him, he took the opportunity to hide into his coffin. That coffin was on the boat from the start. He had sipped some wine beforehand, so he may have been a little drunk... But I believe he entered the coffin intentionally. He was mocking me: You wanted this result, so I fulfilled your wish...! But I couldn't care anymore, so I ran over and closed the lid shut. I wrapped chains all over it, then—"

"You pushed it into the sea... Right?"

Hisui described the ending, but Touko shook her head.

"No... Then my memory stops there. My view became completely dark and I can't remember anymore. Probably... I died right then. Before I could push him into the sea, I breathed my last breath... Probably. By the time I came back to my senses, ten years had passed and you appeared right before me."

"......I see."

After a brief sigh, Hisui gathered his thoughts and tried to deduce the truth from Touko's account.

However, there was still too little information in their grasp.

"Touko-san died... But the coffin fell into the sea. Then the vampire was locked inside? No, the coffin was empty... Where did he escape to? As a vampire, there should be no problem... But the coffin was not damaged... The chains were also intact... What on earth happened?"

Hisui stared into space and spoke slowly.

Eruru also crossed her arms and leaned back to contemplate.

Seeing them both stumped, Mei, who had been observing quietly, raised her hand with a hesitating expression.

"Excuse me... It might be a little rude of me to say this, but can Touko-san's testimony... really be trusted?"

" " "......" " "

Seeing everyone turn their gaze to her, Mei avoided eye contact.

She must have expected this result.

But she felt compelled to bring it up.

She did not take this villainous role willingly, but it was a question that everyone must surely be thinking.

"It's not like I think Touko-san is making everything up. But those affected by the mystic eyes cannot act under their own will, and especially now that she became a ghost, her memories from her days alive are even more uncertain, right? I think we can't take it as truth completely, right?"

"...You have a point. It's true, I don't remember the details, and now that you bring it up, I also......"

Touko lost confidence.

Her intangible, or rather, transparent body became even more transparent, almost as if she were about to disappear outright.

Rushella broke the impasse with a single statement.

"Irrelevant and trivial details. Since I said we are investigating this, I am not going back on my word!"

"Uh, but......"

Hisui want to say something but Rushella held out her index finger to stop him.

"Besides, if we don't believe what this Touko person says, there's nowhere to start. Supposing she is lying completely. The vampire is destroyed or perhaps escaped to a very far place, or there is no vampire to begin with... Let's just assume that for now. But given that's the case, then there's no problem, right?"

Rushella's last question was directed towards Eruru.

Sitting on the side, Eruru was surprised by Rushella's opinion, but she still nodded.

"Indeed. Although it would be regrettable if the search ended up fruitless, it would be best if there is no vampire that is threatening people. If we are the only ones investigating, then there is no issue of wasting taxpayers' money..."

"See, am I right? If it doesn't exist, it doesn't exist. If it exists, then countermeasures must be taken. No matter what, we must find the truth. Then you'll be able to... 'pass on,' right?"

Rushella stared at Touko, who nodded lightly in turn.

Hisui noticed slight tears in the corners of her eyes.

"Well then, the 'interrogation' is over. Let's cut the chitchat, what are we going to do next?"

"Probably... Gather information. We also need to verify how trustworthy her testimony is as well as collect detailed information on the vampire. Furthermore, in order to help her memory return to a more accurate state, we could try visiting scenes with strong connections to her......"

"Very well, first we'll go... to that beach where she first met the vampire!

No objections!!"

Normally, this would just end up as one of Rushella's conceited proclamations that no one heeded.

But on that day, everyone smiled and nodded in agreement.

And currently, Hisui and company were at the beach.

Getting off the bus, walking a short distance, they arrived at a vast beach.

This place used to be small-scale seaside resort, but now it was quite deserted without any visitors.

A well-equipped swimming facility was built here simply because transportation was convenient. But even on a hot and sunny day like today, when one would really enjoy a good dip, there were no people here.

They were met with the pleasant surprise of having a beach all to themselves. But naturally, Hisui's group had come here for a different purpose.

Clearly, that was not their purpose.

However, before his eyes—

"Hey, isn't this weird? Why are you all in swimsuits!?"

By Hisui's side, the beauties made a glamorous entrance, standing side by side.

As a side note, Rushella had made a special trip to buy a swimsuit, dragging Hisui off to the mall to accompany her.

"Oh dear, isn't this Hi-kun's fault, come to think of it? He has so many great choices in us already, yet he's still obsessed with gravure idols."

Saying that, Mei leaned over.

Given her voluptuous figure and smooth tender skin, one could not possibly associate her with the original and ugly Frankenstein's monster.

Her black swimsuit was a micro bikini, covering her extremely ample bosom and posterior areas.

The critical points were barely concealed but she showed no intention to hide them, even exuding a "come hither and look" kind of aura.

"No no, like I said, it was Touko-san's misunderstanding! It just happened that the manga I was reading had a gravure idol on the color page, okay? I wasn't looking at the idol, I just wanted to check if there were color pages for manga series when I flipped to that part!"

Hisui fled from the onslaught of Mei's gigantic breasts as he recalled the conversation from the club classroom.

Since the club's members were basically all girls, Touko became great friends with them quite quickly.

This was not the problem.

Their topics of conversation, however—

"Hey, what's Hi-kun like when he's alone at home?"

"I've heard that he cohabits with Draculea-san... Could you let me know the actual details?"

Mei and Kirika probed into Hisui's private life with great curiosity.

Since Touko was in the same age group, she happily engaged in these conversations and made the most of her stalker gifts, providing sensational news to them again and again.

"Let's see... He stays cooped up in his room, reading magazines with gravure idols on the cover! With giant breasts!"

"Oh~~ I knew it, he still... likes those?"

"Anyway, you already belong to that category......"

"Mumumu, he clearly has me already!"

...Somehow, even Rushella joined the fray.

With rather strange motivations.

"I absolutely refuse to lose. I will stand triumphant over those women who only know how to expose their backs and cleavage, so that he lays his eyes on no one but me!"

"...Indeed, now that summer holidays are approaching, I must seduce him with my swimsuit."

"I was thinking of getting a new set. Ah, i-it's not like I'm doing this just to show Kujou-kun......"

Something was rumbling underfoot, unbeknownst to Hisui.

Then this day arrived.

"...Hey, this is really weird. Am I wrong? Why am I forced to dress the same like you girls!?"

Hisui was full of complaints.

He had been forced to change into swimming trunks.

Since he did not have any casual swimwear, he was forced to buy a pair of red swimming trunks during the shopping trip. To be honest, he did not want this color at all, but unfortunately, it was bought at Rushella's strong recommendation.

"Wouldn't it be nice... to spend time like this on occasion? Furthermore, Touko-san isn't going to recall her whole past by staying confined at home."

"Yeah... I guess......"

Kirika leaned over as she spoke, causing Hisui to reflexively enter a state of alert.

She was wearing a monokini style, one-piece swimsuit in violet.

Although it was less revealing than Mei's bikini, Kirika's back was fully exposed. The side cut-outs in the fabric traced out wide curves, further emphasizing the lines of her narrow waist, producing a different sexiness compared to Mei's.

Combined with her attribute of seniority, Kirika's act of leaning over... Felt rather irresistible.

"Why are you escaping?"

"Uh, I'm not escaping...... Eh, Touko-san?"

Hearing Touko's question, Hisui turned around... to find her behind him.

She was apparently able to control her attire mentally. Hence, she had changed into swimwear to suit the background.

Hers was the school mandated type.

A navy blue school swimsuit.

Furthermore, there was strip of white cloth bearing the name "Touko" on her chest.

"Touko-san, umm, even if you don't imitate them with such tricks, you're already very attractive, you know? You're slender and trim, you have a gentle and graceful temperament, your bust is also... on Senpai's level."

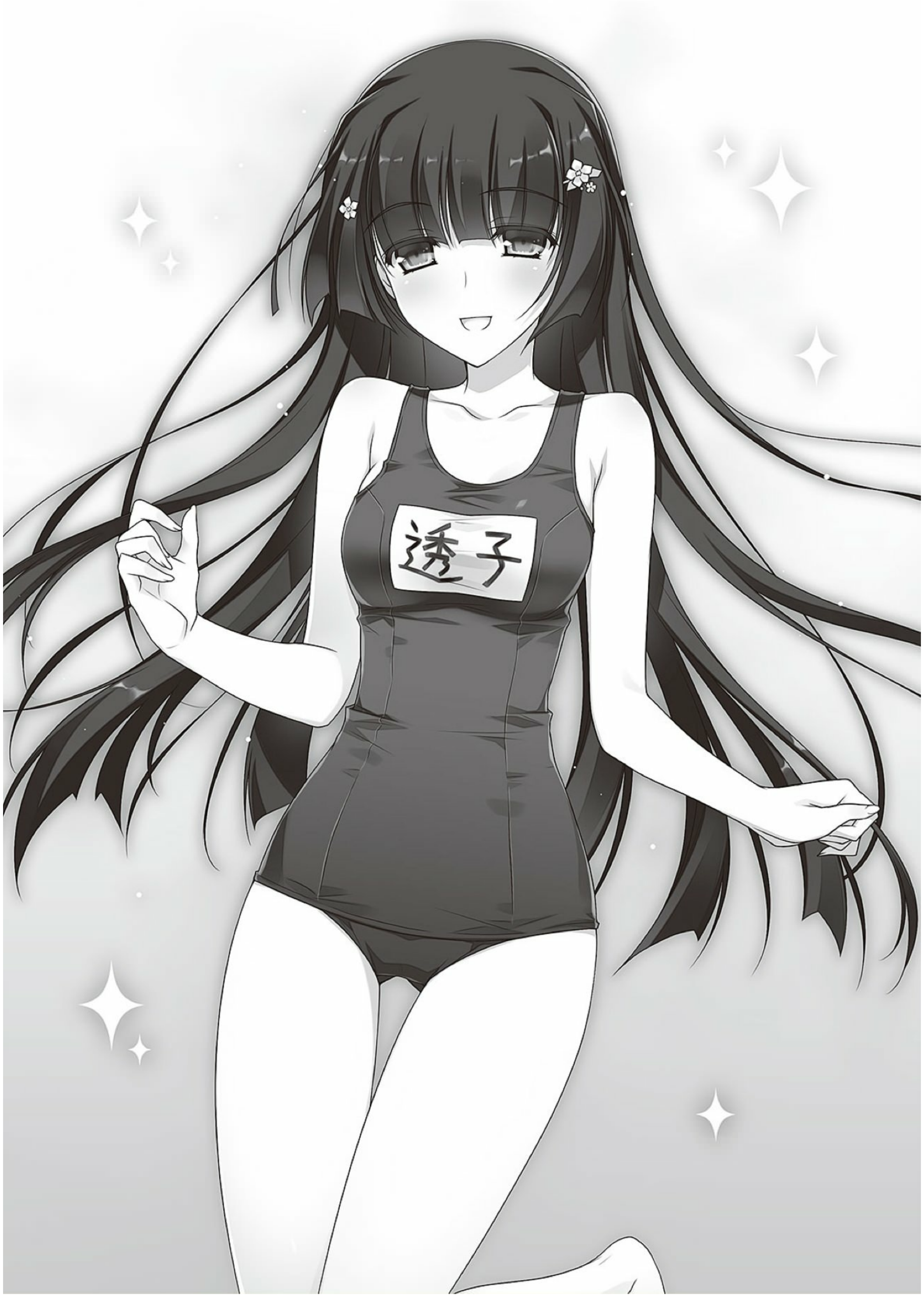
Hisui looked out into the distance as he spoke, a hint of loneliness in his voice.

Why would things be like this?

"Hey, wait a minute, stop looking at me with pitying eyes!"

"Uh, but look, this isn't a swimming lesson at school..."

"I can only wear this type of swimsuit! Because my family was too strict, they wouldn't allow any other type..."



Touko explained with resentment, wringing her hands.

Despite being under the scorching sun, Hisui felt the air temperature drop suddenly. Hopefully, it was only his imagination.

There was a terrifying feeling.

"Hey, stop it, Touko-san... Don't use your cursing skills!"

"Very well, if I focus my imagination, I'm sure can put on a swimsuit of my liking... Yes, one like Sudou-san's...!"

"Umm, sorry, we can't have that. You two's attractiveness will cause war to break out, we really can't have that!"

"That's right, if everyone continues to reveal more, Hi-Kun will surely be forced to bend forward to hide his condition❤"

Saying that, Mei grabbed Hisui's arm and pressed his hand against her bosom.

In actual fact, Hisui was already on the verge of bending forwards. However, he ignored his senses through willpower.

"As if anyone would... Hey, could you let go of my arm?"

"Asking me to let go... Why don't I simply hug so tightly your arm breaks off❤"

"Scary! Coming from you, it totally doesn't sound like a joke! You're perfectly capable of that!"

"Oh dear, I've always been serious, haven't I?"

"Come on..."

"If you don't want that to happen, then play with me properly. Okay, here's a ball so let's play beach volleyball? Whoever fails to return the serve has to participate in a punishment game, okay?"

Mei walked over to one side, picked up the ball and got ready to begin.

Without either a net or boundaries, playing with such simple rules turned out to be even more fun.

"...Jeez, don't you go all out with your strength, okay?"

"Got it❤"

Then the two began to play beach volleyball.

Over in a corner, a certain figure was glaring at them with resentment.

Earlier, Hisui had setup a parasol on the beach and laid out a mat for her. After that, all she could do was sit helplessly in the shadow.

This girl would definitely turn into ash if she were struck by the scorching sunlight of this day.

Namely, this vampire.

Or rather... Rushella.

"Sob sob sob~~ To think I bought this to wear for this occasion..."

Rushella had dragged Hisui off on a special shopping trip to buy this bikini.

Having been tipped off beforehand, Rushella had chosen an especially small swimsuit so as to compete with Mei.

In particular, the flimsy fabric of her top was truly incapable of fulfilling the responsibility of hiding the bountiful fruit of her bosom.

Because Hisui mentioned he did not like excessively fancy colors, Rushella had chosen a light colored swimsuit to be on the safe side... However, she forgot she could not stand exposure to sunlight.

Watching her rival seeking ruin on her own, Mei took care to throw bragging glances of victory while playing beach volleyball, causing Rushella even more displeasure.

"Traitor. To think he would play so happily with that fake..."

Rushella pouted and glared at Hisui resentfully.

But Hisui was fully engaged in the beach volleyball game and completely oblivious.

Just as tears came to Rushella's eyes, Kirika came over to the parasol's shade with a shrug.

"Seriously... What are you doing? If you're a vampire, pay more attention to the sunlight, okay?"

"You're being noisy, shut up......"

There was no spirit in her voice.

Dejectedly, Rushella was tracing circles with her finger on the mat.

"...Okay, stay still and don't move."

Kirika sighed and taking out a white ointment, applied to to Rushella's body.

"S-Stop it right now, what are you doing!? What is this!?"

"A light-blocking agent. Vampires should all know it, right? An ointment for blocking sunlight. The modern ones are now made using science, but it originated from witches like me, invented at the request of vampires. If you apply it to your skin, it will block sunlight at least for the duration of this beach visit. Don't worry, it's harmless to the skin."

Kirika explained as she applied the sunscreen thoroughly over Rushella's body.

Rushella remained silent until she finally steeled herself to speak.

"Uh... Umm."

"Yes?"

"Uh, u-umm...... Thank y... Ouch..."

Probably because she never uttered thanks, Rushella bit her own tongue by accident.

Kirika suppressed the urge to laugh and continued with her task.

"If you want to thank someone, thank Kujou-kun. He must have considered your skincare when he asked me to make preparations."

"Eh...?"

Rushella was taken by surprise. Kirika continued and took out an atomizer to spray something in her hair.

"Hey, what are you doing!? Don't go spraying messed up stuff!"

"This is also a type of light-blocking agent. Hair is also considered a part of skin and must be carefully protected. Otherwise, it will turn to dust under sunlight as well."

"......U-Ummmm......"

"Like I said, the one you should thank is Kujou-kun. Your prided hair was also part of his request. I only considered the skin originally but would have forgotten about hair if he had not reminded me."

"......"

Rushella did not know what to say any longer.

Silently, she watched Hisui happily playing beach volleyball.

"Okay, it's done. Why don't you go join in?"

"......Yes."

Rushella stood at the boundary of shadow and sunlight.

She had never walked under sunlight without a parasol.

Fear gripped her heart to some extent.

If Kirika had any malevolent intentions, she would be scorched by the sunlight the moment she took the first step.

However—She did not falter.

"Hmm... Umm."

"Yes?"

"......Thank you."

This time she did not bite her tongue.

Blushing red, Rushella rushed out from the parasol's shade.

Experiencing direct sunlight for the first time, it felt hotter than usual under a parasol.

Nevertheless, it felt quite comfortable.

"Okay, Hisui, hurry and let me join in too!"

She rushed over with great enthusiasm... But the volleyball game had ended already.

Mei was currently lying forwards on a mat over the sand.

With her top untied.

Beside Mei was Hisui, reluctantly applying suntan lotion on her body.

"W-What are you two doing!?"

"Uh, I lost and had to accept the punishment game. She made me put lotion on her."

"Yes yes. This erotic play is totally consensual."

"Don't call it erotic play!"

"The loser has no right to complain. Hurry and apply it properly."

Mei pulled Hisui's hand to her underarm.

This was a bewitching garden revealed by the untied swimsuit.

Namely, the exposed sideboob.

Boing, Hisui's fingertip touched something.

"Ahh mmm, Hi-kun, don't go poking me..."

"Stop making such lewd sounds! I-I didn't touch anything... Nothing at all......!"

"...I already withdrew my hand, but why is your finger still there?"

"......Grrrrrrr!!"

Rushella released angry growls from her throat as she took up her fists to pummel Hisui.

"...You traitor!!"

"Wah, wait, it really hurts! Stop it!"

"Hey hey, what are you doing......"

Saying that, Mei got up.

Naturally, she was topless.

Hisui reflexively averted his gaze... Impossible, he was treated to a full view.

The heavy fruit was topped with tender colors where smaller, exquisite and lovely fruit protruded.

Mei made no effort to hide. Instead, she puffed out her chest and allowed others to admire the sight.

Meanwhile, Rushella was smashing the back of Hisui's head as hard as she could.

This resulted in the seductive images' forced deletion from the hard drive of Hisui's mind, with a bonus special effect of seeing stars.

"You traitor!! Having an affair right here!!"

"N-No... This is an accident... You're the one who......!!"

Before he could explain himself, Rushella's combo attack landed.

Sitting on Hisui's body, she kept hammering him.

"What are you doing...?"

"Ah, Senpai, you came at the right time! Hurry and stop this girl..."

"Right right... Could you help me put on some sunscreen too?"

Saying that, Kirika turned her exposed back towards Hisui.

This caused the strength of Rushella's blows to rise directly.

"S-Senpai... Please don't add fuel to the fire......!"

"You're being noisy so shut up! I'm going to beat your body up so much that you won't have affairs ever again!!"

Just as the snow-white sand of the beach and Hisui's pale skin were both dyed scarlet, Eruru distanced herself from the inane disputes and quietly stood by herself by the sea shore.

She was wearing a one-piece swimsuit that had a flounced skirt and decorative patterns. It suited her petite figure very well. However, she had no intention of swimming at all.

She simply gazed quietly at the seawater arriving with the waves as they broke over her feet regularly.

Her body shuddered slightly as if she were enduring something.

Like Rushella, she feared seawater.

As the offspring of a vampire and a human—a dhampir, she had inherited the weaknesses of vampires.

They feared flowing "living water."

This applied to natural sources of water especially, even more so for seawater which contained evil-purifying salt. Entering these bodies of water would mean instant drowning.

Although this weakness was less severe than for full vampires, dhampirs were essentially nonswimmers.

If one had to list exceptions, only a brief swim in a shallow warm water pool for elementary school kids would be possible.

Eruru knew this property of her body better than anyone else.

But currently standing on the water's edge... She did not want to accept her cursed body.

She wanted to overcome the weakness as much as possible.

Starting with confronting seawater.

Adjusting her breathing, she calmed her mind and relaxed her body—

"...How long are you going to stand there for?"

Touko asked by her ear.

Her words were accompanied by light exhalation.

A ghost's breath felt like a gust of cold air, invading Eruru's ear in the middle of her nervous state.

"Eek......!"

The chill racing down her spine caused Eruru to shudder and she lost balance.

Before she could resolve herself, her petite body had already fallen into the sea.

Then came a sudden wave.

"～～～～...!!!"

Unable to make a sound, Eruru was engulfed by the seawater.

For a normal person, this would be nothing but an exciting experience in the waves. But to her, it was an impact akin to a tsunami.

"W-What should I do... Hey, someone hurry and help!!"

Hisui and company heard Touko's cries for help.

Apart from Rushella who feared seawater, the rest all rushed over.

Fortunately, Eruru was rescued ashore before she could suffer excessive contact with seawater.

Lying on the beach, her lips purple, her body kept shaking.

"...Hey, isn't it bad for her to be like this? It looks like... She stopped breathing!?"

Hearing Mei's comment, Hisui realized what emergency measures needed to be taken immediately.

"In a time like this, shouldn't we start with CPR!? Umm......"

Who was going to do it... Hisui glanced at the people present.

Rushella and Mei—No. Their excessive strength could end up doing more harm than good, perhaps even stopping the heart directly.

Kirika—No. She was calm and composed, but she did not seem to know how to perform CPR.

Touko—Out of the question. Because she cannot make physical contact at all.

"Looks like I'll have to do it..."

Hisui himself only remembered the approximate method. He tried to recall what he had learned from the PE textbook.

Putting one hand over the other, he positioned them on the center of Eruru's chest.

Then without hesitation, he pressed on the sternum—

"Where are you touching!?"

As soon as Hisui's hand made contact with that soft sensation, Eruru woke up.

Immediately, she got up and punched Hisui flying.

"What the heck! This is an emergency... I had no choice......"

Before Hisui could finish, Eruru collapsed again.

This was hardly unexpected. She had suffered shock and flew into a furor as soon as she woke up.

"Why did she stop breathing again! Jeez......!"

...Hence, Hisui began to perform chest compressions again.

"Hey where are you touching!?"

Eruru sat up and punched him again.

And collapsed again.

This repeated many times until Eruru finally woke up completely.

Adjusting her breathing, she laughed in self-mockery and turned her face away.

"...Go on and laugh at me. You want to laugh, right!? Drowning in such shallow water, go ahead and laugh if you want to, everyone!?"

"...I'm not going to laugh. Hey, you really hurt me with those punches. How many times are you going to punch before you calm down..."

After suffering a beating from Rushella just earlier, Hisui was quite heavily injured currently.

But Eruru's psychological trauma must be much worse.

"Kariya-san... cannot swim? And to a very extreme degree as well... Perhaps better called a phobia?"

Kirika asked with curiosity. Touko also seemed equally puzzled.

Rushella already saw through Eruru's identity long ago, while Mei probably knew even though she never brought it up. The other two had no idea completely.

"Everyone has... something they are not good at. Come, dry yourself first. The sun is setting so put on your clothes."

"No need... to pity me. Just tell everyone about my condition, I do not care......"

Drying her hair, Eruru whispered to Hisui soft enough that only he could hear.

But Hisui dismissed the issue gently.

"If you think you're causing trouble for everyone, tell them yourself. Otherwise, stop making a fuss about your heritage all the time."

"……"

Hisui took his gaze off Eruru who had lowered her head and turned to Touko.

"So... Touko-san, have you remembered anything?"

"No. The location is right for sure, but otherwise..."

"...Then we should try our luck elsewhere. Or how about we ask around in the neighborhood?"

"It is getting late, let me take over from here. I have already booked an inn for myself."

"But you can't investigate if I don't come along, right?"

Hearing Eruru's suggestion, Touko pointed to herself.

Indeed, there was little to investigate if she were not present, however... She was currently haunting Hisui.

"Then Hisui-kun should come along. We'll continue the investigation with the three of us."

Touko suggested innocently.

But this proposal caused the three other girls' beautiful eyebrows to shoot up.

"...I cannot go back while leaving my servant without supervision. Besides, I'm the club president. I will supervise you guys until the investigation is complete!"

"Eruru-chan is going to have a tough time babysitting you guys, let me help?"

"U-Underclassmen wandering about outside at night... Unacceptable! As the one in charge, I must accompany along. Th-This is simply as an upperclassman, and as the student council vice-president, just so you know!?"

The three girls picked their respective reasons for tagging along.

Watching the three of them, Hisui, who originally planned to go home, had no choice but sigh towards the sky.

"...So we're staying here for the night?"

After that, the group decided to check in at the nearby inn.

Thanks to Eruru, the choice of inn was decided immediately. Without mincing words, this inn was more like a guesthouse. Also, due to this sudden influx of guests, all the girls had to stay in the same room.

The only boy—Hisui took the other room. But due to the suddenness of their arrival, the inn had to tidy and prepare the room first. Hisui had no choice but to visit the girls' room first.

After dinner, the members of the group went to take a bath one after another.

As it so happened, Rushella was the last one to take her bath. Finding Hisui and Mei dressed in yukatas as soon as she returned to the room, her face was instantly shrouded with displeasure.

"What are you two doing!?"

"Doing......?"

Mei was sitting on a cushion while Hisui was sitting behind her.

He was holding a comb and a hairdryer in his hands.

"Doing is 'doing,' eh?"

"Stop it with the dirty jokes! As you can see for yourself, I'm blow drying her hair. Because this hairdryer is kind of weak, it should go faster if I help her do it."

While busy telling Mei off and explaining to Rushella, Hisui's hands continued to be occupied with blow drying Mei's hair.

Watching him use the hairdryer and comb skillfully in tandem, Rushella could not find any signs of indecent intentions.

Although not completely satisfied, Rushella sat down beside them.

"To think you would let a man move his hands through your hair so easily. Didn't you know that a woman's hair is her life? If I were you, I'd never permit it."

"Indeed, touching hair requires overcoming more resistance... I have heard of that saying. However, this implies the intimacy of my relationship with Hi-kun..."

"Go on and delude yourself. I'm just a volunteer here. Could you not move randomly?"

"Fine fine. However, Hi-kun's skills are really good. It dries so quickly and feels so comfortable too......"

Mei did not retort and leaned back towards Hisui, relaxing her body and enjoying the experience.

Indeed, from an observer's point of view, Hisui's slender fingers combed the hair, tugging at it lightly at times, spreading it out on other occasions, quickly drying it. And from time to time, he would also confer head and shoulder massages.

"Wow, this feels really pleasurable......"

"Oh really? I'm just doing it out of habit. I was even worrying what I'd do if you suddenly screamed sexual harassment. It's already a habit of mine."

"Seriously, you could even open up a beauty parlor... By the way, how did you get so good at drying hair? It might be a bit rude of me to say this, but Hi-kun, you're not really that particular about your own hair, right?"

Watching Mei's look of ecstasy, the others heard her question and leaned in to listen in interest.

Hisui simply answered emotionlessly with indifference.

"Because I often did this for my foster parent. She asked me to comb her hair, blow dry it and help her take care of it......"

This answer told Rushella exactly whose hair Hisui used to take care of, or rather, was supposed to be taking care of.

The vampire who raised him—Miraluka.

Mei also seemed to understand Hisui's unexpectedly complicated background. Enjoying the warm wind, she asked a question that sliced straight to the heart of the matter.

"It's that vampire, huh... Although I really shouldn't be saying this, couldn't she do her own hair?"

"I said the same thing to her many times... But she doesn't have a reflection in mirror, after all..."

This prompted everyone present to recall the characteristics of vampires.

Mirrors, glass, water surfaces—Every reflective object failed to produce images of a vampire.

In other words, cosmetics and hair care were quite challenging.

"I see, that really does need other's help... Ah, but she can't go to a beauty parlor, since she won't have a reflection in the mirror."

"Yeah... Although there is mind control using the mystic eyes, it'd still require reserving the entire place. Also, if the amount of hypnosis is not controlled carefully, it could end up disastrous. So she did it herself. And ended up with such long hair. This was probably the reason why she didn't use makeup much. Okay, it's done."

Hisui finished his task and turned off the hairdryer.

Blown dry meticulously, Mei's hair seemed as though it was a professional hairstylist's masterpiece, glistening with gentle luster.

She was apparently no joking when she called it pleasurable. Lying on the floor while the comfort of the bath still lingered on her body, her face seemed as though she was in paradise.

"S-So, Kujou-kun...... Could you help me... do it as well?"

Awkwardly, Kirika raised her hand and asked.

Although her hair was not as long as Mei's, it was still quite wet because she had returned from the bath not too long ago.

"Uh, sure... But Senpai, I get the feeling that you probably won't like having boys do this sort of thing. Are you really okay with it?"

"Hmm, well, umm...... It's not like I'd allow anyone to do it..."

Kirika blushed but Hisui did not discern her intentions.

Touching hair was in a certain sense more challenging than touching skin—Mei had said something like that earlier.

"By the way, I sometimes wonder if you have a maid to do this at home, starting with drying your body."

"What is with that wondering!? Since my parents are often away from home, yes, I do have a servant to help around the house. But I still take care of my personal life myself! I don't allow anyone to enter my room..."

"Oh wow, they really do exist. High-class ladies through and through."

"...This is irrelevant anyway. So... You are unwilling?"

Fidgeting with her fingers, Kirika looked up and pleaded to Hisui.

For someone who did not know the vice-president's true face, seeing her drop her usual stern demeanor must be quite a shocking sight.

"No, I'm fine with it as long as you are, Senpai."

"Well then, thanks......"

Kirika turned around and entrusted her hair to Hisui.

Hisui began to work quietly, causing Rushella, whose mood was poor to begin with, to display further displeasure on her face, grumbling with her pouting lips.

"Hmph, why is everyone so unprincipled? To take a woman's life so lightly..."

She muttered for quite a while but neither Hisui nor Kirika heard her.

Blushing, Kirika chatted with Hisui about her hair.

"...My hair has split ends, right? Would it... be troublesome for you?"

"Oh not at all. I think your hair is very pretty."

"...R-Really? P-Please go harder when massaging me... Please massage longer..."

"Yeah, the student council's work must be quite tiring~~"

Hisui answered as he rubbed Kirika's shoulders with his slender fingers.

Right beside them, Rushella was gnashing her teeth with murderous intent on her face. However, the two did not notice.

"How nice, I'd like one too......"

Let alone a massage, Touko was unable to take a bath in the first place. She murmured in admiration. At this moment, Kirika's hair had also finished drying and another customer laid herself down in ecstatic paradise. Mei was still sleeping where she had lain earlier.

"Okay, done."

"Hmph... Watching your embarrassed expression, you must be doing this just for the chance to feel up girls, right!?"

"I've been desperately suppressing those feelings, okay!"

"...However, your skills seem quite good...... Well, umm... If you really want to, no matter what... I could allow you to do my hair too?"

Rushella asked in a testing manner as she showed off her beautiful hair.

However, Hisui shook his head in annoyance.

"Sigh, forget it. I haven't done this for a long time and even did two in a row. My hands are tired. This takes so much energy. Besides, isn't your hair dry already?"

As soon as he finished, Hisui's face was greeted by Rushella's punch.

"Ouch, what the heck......"

"Jerk......"

Rushella grumbled softly.

Unlike her usual outbursts of emotion, her quiet tone of loneliness made Hisui at a loss.

Without saying a word, Rushella left the room.

She most likely left the inn... But instead of dashing out madly through the door, she simply walked normally.

Inside the quiet room, the sound of Rushella's footfall outside sounded especially loud.

"What's wrong with her brain again...... Don't you all agree?"

Hisui sought agreement from the girls.

But no one looked at him.

"Eh... What's with this atmosphere?"

"It was totally your fault just now, Hi-kun."

"I can't deny Sudou-san and my role in this, but you are the one at fault, Kujou-kun."

"Hisui-kun, you'd better go apologize."

Not only Mei and Kirika, but even Touko were remarking with deep feeling. Despite being a ghost from the same age, perhaps because having spent a decade sleeping under the sea, she sounded especially mature in tone.

"Eh... What's the situation now?"

Besieged from all directions again, Hisui looked over to his last source of hope—Eruru.

Because she was the first to enter the bath, added to the fact of her short hairstyle, Eruru's hair had dried long ago and she simply watched quietly all this time. Now, she scolded as though she were glaring at trash:

"Hurry up and die."

"You can't be serious... Right?"

"Sorry, please do not look at me. Your gaze causes my value to drop as a human."

"What are you treating me as......?"

Hisui was dealt a heavy blow. He turned and looked at the trio on the side.

Without prior communication, they all pointed at the door simultaneously.

In order words, "Hurry up and go."

"...This is the end result? Honestly, I really want to sleep......"

"Sleep all you want. I'll simply grant you eternal slumber using my strength."

"Be careful that I don't curse you with nightmares."

"...Isn't it said that when traveling, one could encounter sleep paralysis, spellbound by haunted beds?"

Faced with the smiling faces of the artificial human, the witch and the ghost, the helpless boy had no choice but to resign to his fate.

"...I'll be right back."

" " "Take care." " "

Chapter 4 - Nightmare First Thing in the Morning

After Hisui left, he found Rushella much easier than he imagined.

Having left the inn, Rushella was on the main road, walking towards the beach.

However, she was not wearing the yukata she had worn after coming out of the bath. Instead, she had gone somewhere to change into the swimsuit she had worn during the daytime.

By the time Hisui caught up to her, she had already crossed the beach and reached the edge of the waves.

"Dressed like that, are you thinking of swimming? Be careful or you'll just repeat what happened to Kariya. Stop making a fuss."

"...You're so noisy."

"Although it's already night, it's fine if you want to wear your swimsuit... But if you drown, I'm not gonna save you. I'm not a particularly good swimmer either."

"...Shut up."

As the sound of the waves vaguely filled the air, spontaneously... The two of them started taking a stroll.

"Oh... By the way."

"What?"

"Uh... I admit I was wrong."

"What did you do wrong?"

"Well... Umm, I'm not too sure either."

This terrible answer made Rushella even more displeased.

"Does this even count as an apology? Didn't that foster parent of yours teach you properly?"

"That's really harsh, you know......"

Hisui noticed it vaguely.

Every time his foster parent was mentioned, his arrogant master would throw a temper tantrum.

Seeing as they were both vampires, especially 'True Ancestors' as well, clearly conversations related to Miraluka might lead somewhere related to Rushella's lost memories—However, she always sulked.

"About what happened during the day."

"Huh?"

"About that... sunscreen."

"Thank Senpai if you wanna thank someone. She made it specially for you, busy as she is."

"......!"

Instantly, Hisui suffered another beating.

Rushella did not use her full strength, but this lukewarm level of force actually expressed her inner displeasure even more clearly.

"Why are you hitting me?"

"You're being noisy so shut up. Besides, I don't care even if I can't sunbathe during the daytime. The way humans worship sunlight, treating the sun's blessings as a supreme existence, that's such a narrow viewpoint. Vampires are unable to live under sunlight, neither do we appreciate how precious the sun may be, but because of that—"

"They understand the beauty of the night, right?"

Rushella turned around.

A simple and ordinary motion. However, Hisui could not help but stop walking.

That beautiful face, illuminated by the lighting known as moonlight; that gorgeous body, clad in flimsy fabric; that clear, snow-white skin—Everything was so perfect and flawless.

Rather than Rushella serving as a foil to the beauty of the night, it would be better to say that night existed for her sake—That was the kind of illusion he felt.

This was the vampire—no, Rushella—under the night sky.

Whether a vampire under the night sky or an exceptionally beautiful vampire, Hisui should have been used to these sights already despite his relatively young life. However, the sight of Rushella at night, from the very first night they met till now—She has always been so breathtaking.

"I never thought that you'd still be so cute."

"What did you just say?"

Rushella asked suspiciously.

Her crimson gaze was not burning with the light of the mystic eyes. Although the mystic eyes had no effect on Hisui, he could see her eyes glimmering from a magical power different from the mystic eyes.

Speaking of a vampire's charm at night, it was a seductive quality that drew mortals into a demonic realm.

Hence, Hisui did not stare directly.

"You came chasing after me, yet you refuse to look me in the eye. What an incomprehensible guy you are. Who knows how your parents taught you."

"How unfortunate, I was raised by a vampire."

"It's not like I hate her."

"……?"

"I simply hate the fact… that it seems like I'm always one step behind."

"……"

"No matter what's being said, what's being done, that woman's name always comes up."

Rushella spoke with chagrin as she started walking again.

Hisui had no words to answer and could only follow behind her.

'That's normal since I've lived with her for so long.' 'I know very clearly you're not her.'—These kinds of explanations were very legitimate and anyone could easily say them. But for some reason, Hisui could not bring himself to voice them.

Hence he only chose to escape this mood.

"...Why did you believe Touko-san?"

"......"

"She's probably not lying. Perhaps she's a little obsessive. Maybe she died a wrongful death. But still, you decided to help her. She's just a human. And a dead human at that, yet you've gone out of your way to fulfill her long-cherished wish, why is that?"

"You actually know already, right?"

Rushella answered with a question, not even looking back.

Hisui answered affirmatively through silence while deducing her true intentions.

Indeed, in the classroom at the very beginning, when Rushella had proposed helping Touko, he had already sensed it vaguely.

Why would Rushella specifically go out of her way to help a mere human?

Because—

"It's because... I resonated with her. Having no memories is quite painful, yes?"

"I think so too."

Fellow sufferers of the same affliction... Applying such a description would be too simple.

The pain brought about by amnesia that Rushella occasionally expressed was something that Hisui could never comprehend.

On that day, suddenly waking up to a surprise in a strange and unfamiliar world, without any kin by her side, not even knowing her own identity—Touko's situation was actually much better than hers.

"So that's why... You decided to help her?"

"That's not the sole reason, you know? Umm... That vampire who bit her, he offends me."

"......"

"Drinking blood is understandable, yes...... But etiquette cannot be ignored, right? Whether taking victims as servants or simply killing them, umm... But to keep them bound even after death, that's unacceptable..."

Rushella sounded as though she were making excuses.

Hisui could also gather a slight hint that she was trying to test the way he felt.

Rushella herself was probably self-aware of this, hence she did not face Hisui when talking to him.

"About Touko-san, I think she can't let go because of her own obsession. Not passing onto the next life is because of that. The wound on her neck is a reminder to herself not to forget... That's my feeling."

"......Even if that's the case, the cause still lies with that member of my kin, right? Being bitten by a vampire is a serious matter."

"To think you'd say that so shamelessly when you keep drinking my blood all the time."

"Y-You're a separate matter, okay!? Drinking your blood doesn't cause you any problems. More importantly, you belong to me!"

Rushella turned around and snarled.

Coincidentally, a wave crashed down by her feet, causing Rushella to lose balance.

Although it was a calm wave that did not rise above the ankles, "living water" was a major threat to vampires, especially seawater which contained salt with its exorcising and purifying properties. Once splattered, seawater caused local paralysis.

"Ah......!"

Hisui was unable to catch her in time. Rushella fell and landed on her bottom.

Her body was also splashed with seawater.

"Ooh, oooooooooh......"

Her delicate body trembling, Rushella could not help but hug herself tightly.

She felt chilled to the bone and a sense of paralysis spreading throughout her entire body.

As a pure vampire, she was even more sensitive to living water than Eruru.

Even if it was not fatal, in the worst case, it could render her in a temporary state of suspended animation.

"This has happened before, right. The second day we met, you were drenched in heavy rain."

"Y-You're being noisy, shut up......!"

Hisui smiled wryly and covered her with the jacket he had taken when he left the inn.

It should help her stay warm to some extent.

"Here, can you stand up?"

"......Yeah."

Rushella obediently held Hisui's outstretched hand and left the seawater.

"I-I'm not going to thank you, okay!"

"I'm not expecting it in the first place."

"Y-You are in charge of serving me, showing utmost attentive care is only natural!"

"Got it."

"H-How much longer are you going to hold my hand!?"

"......"

Indeed, Hisui had been holding Rushella's hand all this time.

And in a fairly forceful grip.

"Why... are you holding my hand? C-Could it be, that... You want to... hold hands with me?"

Rushella spoke with an expression that was not altogether displeased.

For a vampire, especially at night, shaking Hisui's slender hand off would be a piece of cake.

But she did not do so.

"L-Let me say this to you...... As a reward for your everyday efforts... I'll allow you slightly... Umm... To touch a little. In the future when I attend balls, it's also your responsibility to accompany me as my escort..."

Finding a legitimate reason, Rushella did not release her hand.

Seeing her shy appearance, Hisui spoke up.

But his voice sounded a bit awkward.

"I can touch?"

"S-Sure..."

Immediately, Hisui's empty left hand grabbed Rushella's breast.

"Eh......?"

Cries of shock were emitted from both Rushella and Hisui's mouths.

"H-How dare you!?"

Before she could stop him... Hisui's left hand was already squeezing Rushella's bulging breast, his five fingers sinking deeply into her supple flesh.

"W-What are you doing!? Th-This behavior......!"

"Because you said I could touch."

That awkward tone of voice again, but unmistakably, it was Hisui's voice.

However, Rushella did not notice these suspicious signs but simply blushed and twisted her body.

"R-Release me now... This......!"

"......"

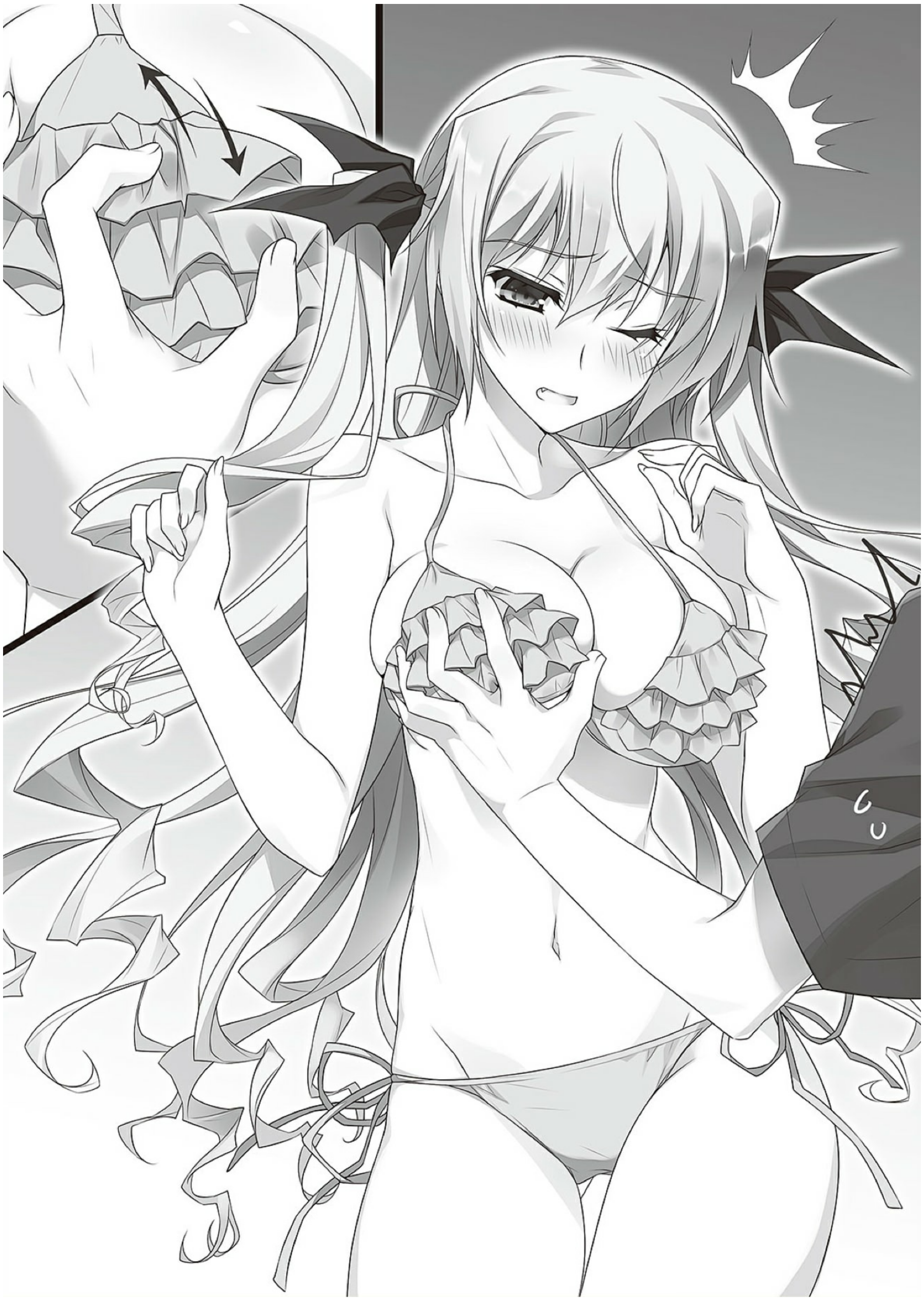
Hisui's left hand moved.

Without causing Rushella any pain, but firm enough to hurt if she tried to escape—Using this amazingly fine-tuned level of force, he held her... Or rather, he was groping her.

"S-Stop it... This kind of thing... Unacceptable...... This......"

The bikini top was already very skimpy. Currently, it could be said that Hisui's hand was touching her skin directly.

Who knew if it was because her unguarded breast was being groped by him, or for some other reason—Rushella was pleading in a sweet tone of voice.



"L-Let go now! This... No......"

Tears appeared in the corners of Rushella's eyes.

But Hisui's attention was directed elsewhere.

He was desperately grabbing his left hand with his right, trying to pull his left hand away from Rushella's breast.

"Y-You... what on earth are you doing? Hurry, let go......!"

"...I'm trying very hard right now......! My hand just moved on its own......!!"

"Huh......?"

"My mouth didn't listen to me either and said strange things on its own! What the heck is going on...!?"

Indeed... He was not joking. His left hand really did move on its own.

Not some kind of uncontrollable impulse of puberty... But it truly moved on its own.

And his mouth spoke words contrary to his will.

In a state of panic over this body that did not belong to him, Hisui did not have the leisure to enjoy the soft sensations experienced by his left hand.

"Hey hey, this whatever situation is really quite serious!?"

"How would I know!? Hurry and let go! S-Stop it... Don't use your nails to scratch through the fabric!"

Rushella finally reached the limits of her embarrassment and swung her fist at Hisui's face.

Nevertheless, his stubborn left hand continued to grip Rushella's breast firmly, refusing to let go.

"Looks like you're not faking it... What on earth is going on!?"

"As if I would know! Hey, you'd better hurry and help think of a way too! A bit of violence is fine, just get my hand away!"

"Don't give me orders while you're having your way with my breast! But if this continues, it's definitely unforgivable!"

Rushella grabbed Hisui's left hand with both hands.

Given the situation, she intended to use her full strength—Just as she was about to pull, she discovered another hand overlapping Hisui's left hand.

With even whiter skin than Hisui—more accurately, it was translucent, beyond the realm of "white."

The translucent hand and Hisui's hand were overlapping and Rushella recognized it.

Exchanging glances with Hisui, the two figured out the truth.

"What are you doing, Touko-san!?"

Hisui directed his question beside him where Touko was smiling with a mischievous expression.

"Oh dear, I'm caught red-handed now?"

"Did you really think you won't get caught!? What kind of performance are you trying to pull here?"

"This is what's called 'possession.' I tried it and it worked. Although it doesn't work on girls, it seems to be fine with Hisui-kun."

"What... How thoroughly are you going to possess my body!?"

"Hmm... It looks like the limit is controlling the left side of your body and saying a few words. I will practice more and try harder❤"

"Could you not say such dark things with such a cute face!? Why are you doing this!?"

"That's right, I don't care if you control this guy, but why did you make him grope my breast!?"

"Watching you two just makes me so impatient. Two people walking on the beach with no one else... Can't you try harder given this wonderful background? Especially you, Hisui-kun..."

"No no, I only came to bring her back......"

"Look, you're both alive and have bodies, why not have a passionate romance? Once you're dead, it'll be too late, right?"

"Uh, well......."

Her words sounded so convincing no matter what.

As expected of a dead person's speech.

"...Hey, don't change the subject! Could you stop deciding on your own to control someone else's body, okay!?"

"That's right, I'm a vampire, this guy is a human... We are master and servant! Not... Not that kind of... relationship......"

Despite words of refutation, Rushella's voice grew softer and softer, her tone also became hesitant.

Touko crossed her arms and examined the two of them, finally shrugging in exasperation.

"Well, whatever. To be honest, rather than worrying about your relationship, I'd rather taste the bittersweet springtime of youth personally."

"Besides, since I'm haunting Hisui-kun's body anyway, whatever you do, I'll follow you automatically."

"Wah, this is so troublesome!"

"Seriously, not only am I getting stared at all day, even my body gets snatched away......"

Wouldn't it be better to hurry and hold a service to help her pass on—Rushella and Hisui communicated through their eyes. Touko began to smile mischievously again.

"Say... Umm, since I can converse normally with you two, that means that Hisui-kun has regained his freedom, you know? Besides, I can't control him for long periods of time."

"What!?"

Only prompted by her did he realize.

Indeed, since Touko was no longer in Hisui's body, his control should no longer be affected.

Clearly not under influenced by someone else—Yet Hisui's left hand continued to grab Rushella's breast.

"Ah."

Hisui finally regained his senses.

Then preparing himself for the worst, he closed his eyes.

Farewell, cruel world.

"You great big idiot!!"

A completely merciless fist of iron crashed into his face, sending Hisui pitifully falling into the sand.

Although he collapsed, his left hand still maintained its posture in the shape of Rushella's breast.

"How did it feel?"

Touko approached and asked. In a hazy state of mind, Hisui left his last words.

"A perfect combination of volume and softness......"

"I'm glad you enjoyed it❤ Originally, I should use my own body to thank you, but it's a shame that not even my bones remain."

Touko smiled tenderly and made a joke with dark humor. Hisui did not know if he should laugh or cry.

But the next sentence he heard caused all his nerves to tense up.

"Flirting with a vampire, my, what a hobby you have there eh?"

"It's you......"

Hisui stood up.

A tall woman was standing with her back to the moonlight.

Oogami Rangetsu.

"Going out with a vampire at night isn't really commendable. You should be a little more vigilant."

"Who is this?"

Not recognizing her, Rushella asked Hisui.

"Kariya's colleague. She's supposed to be an official detective. So...... What business do you have here?"

"I came to warn you. It seems like you're assisting Kariya Eruru, so I'd like to advise you to mind your own business. There was no vampire in the coffin. That's the entire situation, yes?"

"Even so, isn't assistance voluntary?"

"Let me remind you that it's smarter not to go against the nation's interests, okay? If this sort of unofficial investigation goes wrong, your personal safety is not guaranteed. Besides, you probably have no idea, but she is actually—"

"A dhampir. Is there a problem?"

Hisui cut her off.

Rangetsu showed surprise but immediately regained her composure and mocked sarcastically.

"So you actually knew... Yet you can still hang around her all the time. Plus this vampire as well. Are you really human?"

"Who knows......"

Rangetsu did not know about Hisui's constitution.

Hence, despite mocking him, she was actually worrying for Hisui's safety.

"If you want to investigate me, I welcome you any time. But that will really be a waste of taxpayers' money."

"...What an arrogant brat. Fine, I'll pass. If you were no longer human, Kariya Eruru would surely execute you instantly. However, I never would have expected her to reveal her identity to you... From my observation, she has always hidden it quite well."

"She doesn't trust me that much. I discovered it on my own."

"Oh dear... How unexpected. Looks like you have a few talents of your own. She probably allowed you to accompany her because she appreciates your smarts? And that ghost beside you, you really must have a taste for the supernatural, eh?"

(...She can see her?)

Rangetsu's words clearly indicated that she could see Touko.

After all, as a member of the Supernatural Investigations Section, this level of ability was apparently standard.

"Although I'm not sure why she's possessing you, do you need an exorcism? I have professionals in my team."

"Not necessary. Although the chill troubled me for a while, I'm already used to it now."

"Really...... If you ever part ways with Kariya Eruru, feel free to contact me any time. I wish to talk to you."

Saying that, she threw her name card straight towards Hisui, flying through the dark night.

Her motion was like throwing a poker card, but before it could reach Hisui, Rushella had already thrown her short sword to strike it down onto the sand.

"...What are you doing?"

"If you want to recruit my servant, you'll have to go through me first. How displeasing you are."

Rushella spoke unhappily.

Rangetsu laughed lightly and nimbly leapt off the sand.

Within the blink of an eye, her stern and cold face had already appeared right before Rushella's face.

Despite the unfavorable mobility on a beach's sandy surface, she had closed their distance in by a simple leap.

"......!"

Rushella reacted reflexively.

Because she instinctively judged this woman as a threat.

She reached straight for the target's heart.

Given the length and sharpness of Rushella's fingers, combined with her speed and sturdiness, penetrating a body of flesh would be a piece of cake.

"...Ha?"

After laughing derisively, only then did Rangetsu react.

No, more accurately, she only started moving after confirming Rushella's movements.

Her counterattack was a very simple sweeping kick delivered at mid level.

She first withdrew and folded her long and slender leg, then shot it out like a spring.

The exchange only happened within the blink of an eye, resulting in an instant, decisive victory.

The loser—was Rushella.

Her attack missed and she suffered a kick to her abdomen, sending her flying into the air, finally landing in the shallows.

"You...!!"

"This is nothing to a vampire, right? No actual harm done. Besides, it's even nighttime as well. Oh right, but isn't the seaside rather troublesome? There's the danger of drowning."

Rangetsu simply spoke indifferently, completely unconcerned with Rushella's safety.

"I hate vampires the most. Naturally, dhampirs are not exempted. If the higher-ups make the decision, I will destroy them any time."

"......!"

Hisui glared at Rangetsu without saying a word.

His eyes were burning with distinct hostility, a rare occasion. But Rangetsu turned around, unfazed.

"I would advise you not to get any funny ideas. The only reason why this vampire lives is because there are no concrete records of her attacking any human... That's all. No matter what the reason is, once she makes a move, she'll be added to our extermination list. Please pass that onto her."

Saying that, Rangetsu departed leisurely.

"Hisui-kun......"

"I know."

Hearing Touko's sad voice, Hisui nodded. Instead of chasing after Rangetsu, rescuing Rushella was more important.

Rangetsu was not lying. A simple blunt attack could not kill a vampire at night.

Instead of causing direct damage, her kick was intended to send Rushella falling into the sea.

What was surprising was her speed that surpassed a vampire at night.

"Are you okay......?"

At Rushella's location, the seawater was at waist-level.

Hisui picked her up in his arms. Rushella was already completely pale, her lips blue, having lost all strength in her body.

After retrieving her short sword that was embedded in the sand, Hisui silently carried Rushella on his back and started returning to the inn.

Touko followed behind him, gazing solemnly at Hisui's back.

For some reason, she did not circle around in front of them.

Touko did not want to see Hisui's face at this time.

"I was thinking of fetching you but this happened? What on earth took place to develop into this situation?"

As soon as Hisui stepped into the inn, Eruru asked him in surprise.

After all, it was only natural to be surprised at the sight of Rushella completely drenched, carried on Hisui's back.

"It's all your colleague's fault. That Rangetsu person."

"Oogami-san...? Why!?"

"I'd like to know too."

After handing Rushella over to Mei and Kirika to take care of her, Hisui told Eruru about everything that happened on the beach just now.

"...I see. Looks like she is tracking down the vampire too."

"Didn't she conclude herself that there was no vampire in the coffin? Why would she come here then?"

"I am guessing it is what the higher-ups wanted. There was definitely no vampire in the coffin but there could be other coffins. Or perhaps there were some other vampire-related clues. Putting aside the truth, someone in the higher-ups with a close relation with her must have decided and sent her here to investigate. Then following the obvious trail, she found us—Probably something like that."

"Competing factions, struggles for power, everyone is secretly vying for domination. When she disparaged you in that underground facility last time, was she taunting the opposing faction?"

"It probably does carry that level of significance. After all, it is true that no vampire was found. There is nothing the opposing faction could say. The ones holding power in the organization basically understand very well."

Looks like that Rangetsu woman's social skills were quite smooth and slick, in a different way from Eruru.

Furthermore, in terms of dealing with vampires, she also possessed the corresponding capability.

Hisui really did not want to make an enemy out of someone like her.

"She looks like she really hates vampires. Are the hardliners intending to catch the vampire first then secretly destroy him?"

"Although it's public knowledge that she hates vampires, her boss is actually a conservative. Perhaps the orders are to prioritize capture over extermination."

"That doesn't sound too conservative actually. Instead of advocating coexistence with vampires... Catching them and conducting research... Is that what it means to be conservative?"

"Indeed. In contrast, the hardliners advocate instant execution of everything harmful to humans, no matter what. As a compromise of these two camps, the current policy prescribes tolerance for vampires that have not attacked humans."

"So... Which side do you belong to?"

Eruru did not answer.

When they first met, surely she would have declared herself in the hardliner camp without hesitation.

Then what about... now?

"Your room is apparently prepared already. I'll take you there, follow me."

"Yes—"

Hisui did not press the issue further. He followed her.

"But I feel kind of bad. A single room for me alone? You girls don't have a huge room but you need to squeeze four people there?"

"Genders need to sleep in separate rooms, right? It's not like we can't split the group in half. Obviously this is the only way."

"That's true."

"We're there."

Eruru stopped and opened the door.

Appearing before their eyes was a dimly lit Japanese style room. The floor was entirely filled with blankets.

"This is... Perhaps?"

"The bedding storage."

Eruru stated simply.

The bedding storage—Just as its name implied, it was the store room for keeping blankets and other bedding supplies.

Despite serving various purposes in different inns, they always had a common function as a storeroom for miscellaneous items, and they were not supposed to be rented out for customers to stay in.

"Eh——What kind of joke is this!? Why would they open this for customers!?"

"Originally, I was the only one planning to stay at this inn. Now that our numbers increased all at once, but their rooms are already fully booked, this cannot be helped... So that is the situation."

"You can't be serious... There's no place to lie down here. The room is completely occupied by blankets."

"This cannot be helped. It is the bedding storage."

"...I see."

"Also, the rent does not come cheap. The part I paid for you already, you need to fully reimburse me later."

"Eh, I need to pay for it out of my own pocket!? And so expensive!? Living in the bedding storage!?"

"After all, we're not on an official investigation. Besides, this is originally unavailable for guests. They only allowed you to live in it after I negotiated with them. Expensive is only normal."

"Uh, this... Fine......"

Although Eruru's explanation made sense, Hisui could not accept it entirely.

Clearly, a room's price should be in direct proportion with its quality.

Although he had many more complaints, Hisui could only swallow them, fearful of the risk that Eruru might simply kick him out. In any case, he decided to first make sure he had a place to sleep. Hisui entered the room.

"This is so dark... Where's the light switch?"

"I think it would be better to keep the lights off, yes? There might be spattered bloodstains... Rather, because this room was not meant for people to live in, there might be many filthy stains. What you do not see will not bother you."

"Hey, did you just say spattered bloodstains? You did say that, right!?"

"I said it."

"Eh, now you admit it directly!? I was thinking you might deny it a bit first!?"

"Hurry up and get rid of those fantasies."

"Why are you counseling me... Speaking of which, this room is that type of room you mentioned, isn't it!?"

"Because it is the bedding storage."

"Bedding storage = a room with an unspeakable past, does such an equation exist!? And so expensive too, what the heck is going on!?"

"It is all because no one normally lives in this room. Besides, the inn consented only because I negotiated. Please be understanding."

Eruru's expression looked as though she was listening to a raving madman.

Her adorable face did not show any emotion while she simply spoke severe words in an indifferent tone of voice.

"B-But, isn't it serious with spattered bloodstains...? Shouldn't there be some exorcism charms?"

"Do not worry, they have been ripped off already."

"That's a great cause for worry! Don't go unsealing the charms!!"

"Having exorcism charms in a room where someone is living in would not be very appropriate, right? Are you trying to express your dissatisfaction with my thoughtful service?"

"What are you getting angry for!? This inn has a problem if it's got a bloodstained room in the first place, doesn't it!?"

"Although the inn was not too willing, they finally agreed. Well, in fact, renting this room out in itself was quite a stretch. In the end, I forced the issue by requesting repeatedly that 'This person insists on living here' so the inn finally relented."

"Now even the inn hates me!! Don't go making use of your negotiation skills in this kind of area!!"

"Do not worry. Even though I tried, the exorcism charms are not entirely ripped out. After all, they are perfectly intact on the underside of the tatami."

"Of course I'm worrying!! Doesn't that make it even more terrifying!!"

It looked like things had gone beyond the issue of whether he could sleep or not.

Whether he could leave this room alive in the morning, that would be a serious question.

"Is it really okay...? I really feel like there's a huge problem, okay?"

"You have been possessed already, right? What difference does it make, one more or one less? Isn't there an old saying, 'being haunted by one ghost is as bad as being haunted by two,' right?"

"The difference is huge...... Jeez, whatever, I'm not gonna turn on the light then. I'll just not think about anything and sleep directly!!"

Hisui sighed with complete self-abandon and entered the dark room.

In order to stay oblivious of his surroundings, he casually covered his head with a blanket.

"Then a goodnight to you. Sweet dreams."

"...I won't forget this."

Grumbling from beneath a blanket, Hisui closed his eyes and headed off to the land of dreams.

Who knew if it were a blessing or a curse, but Hisui rapidly fell asleep.

He was probably exhausted from this and that happening.

There were no nightmares. Neither did he wake up in the middle of the night. He slept through the night and morning arrived directly.

Although he had not set an alarm on his cellphone, he still woke up at the usual time.

And just as usual, a warm and soft sensation was pressing on his chest.

A sweet fragrance.

The feeling of his neck bitten.

As well as—Sharp pain.

Opening his eyes, he found Rushella lying on top of him, slurping as she drank blood from his neck.

"......You're even doing this during a trip!!"

"Stop being so noisy, you're making a ruckus early in the morning!!"

Probably recovered after a night's rest, Rushella's expression revealed nothing about the injuries she suffered the night prior.

Just as usual, she was embracing him tightly, having her daily meal.

"Ouch——!! Damn it, you're sucking too much at once!!"

"You're being noisy so shut up! I got kicked by that woman and fell into the sea, right!? So right now, I need to drink to my fill! Just lie still and don't make a fuss!"

"I don't wanna~!!"

"Watch me put you in your place......!!"

A boy and a girl, both dressed in yukatas, were wrestling with each other.

This sort of clothing was very susceptible to getting pulled open.

In actual fact, Hisui's collar was already messed up by Rushella's hand, leaving his chest open wide, almost half naked.

And as a result of Hisui's struggles, Rushella's clothing had become a bit... Disheveled.

Also because this was her first time wearing Japanese style clothing, the sash was not tied securely.

Hence, when Hisui struggled with his arms and legs, he reached for the collar and caused the chest portion of Rushella's yukata to slide off.

"Ah...... Sorry."

A bountiful bosom jumped right in front of his eyes.

Perhaps because they were staying outside overnight, or maybe because she was not wearing Hisui's shirt as usual like at home, it was fortunate that Rushella was wearing a bra properly.

Even so—wrapped in a white and lacy bra, her breasts were drawing Hisui's full and complete attention through their sheer overwhelming volume.

"Not allowed to look——!!"

Her left and right hands alternated to deliver a series of slaps, turning Hisui's head into a rattle drum.

Naturally, Rushella's intense exertion also caused her bosom to wobble and shake from side to side, nonstop.

A man's instincts conferred Hisui with astounding vision despite the high-speed motion of his head. Wobbling intensely in all directions, his eyes captured clear images of the dangling fruit.

"I already said, not allowed to look!!"

"Then cover it up yourself!"

"You're noisy so shut up!!"

In an attempt to hide her exposed bosom, Rushella directly pressed her chest against Hisui's chest.

Yes, it was hidden now, but this caused new problems.

"Hey hey, Rushella-san... Could you stop that? Pressed like this together, it's really... Although there was a bath towel separating us last time... I'm half naked with my chest bare today, even with your bra in between, it's really disastrous......"

"What's so disastrous!? Apart from the blood in your entire body rushing down and concentrating in your lower body!?"

Rushella was able to read the bloodflow of a person she was touching. Hence she retorted after analyzing.

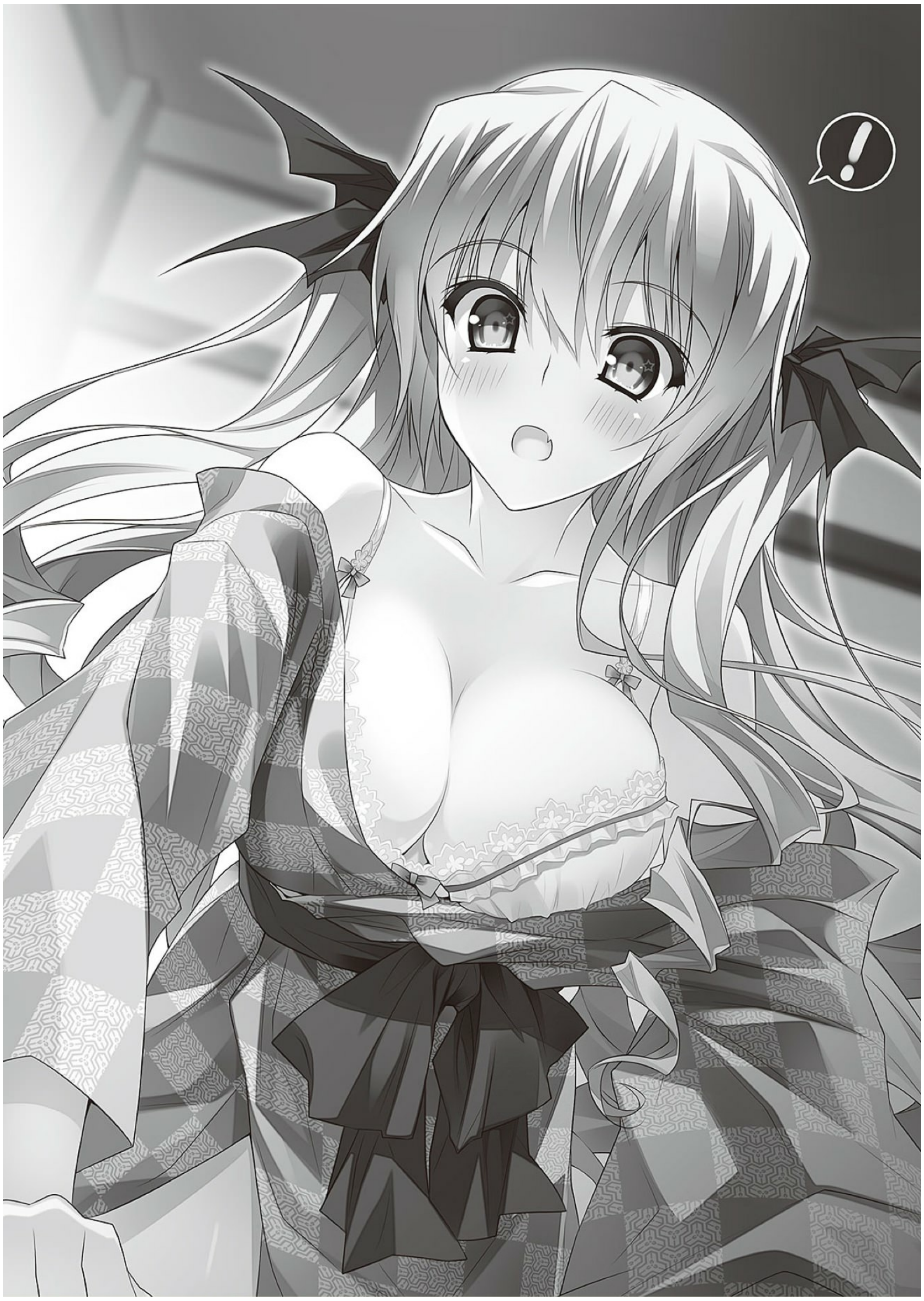
Indeed, all the blood in his body was converging there.

Even if that was not his intention, it was also morning.

And there was even someone pressing her breasts against him.

Oh the woes of a man.

"Umm, sorry... Let's talk about blood drinking and apologies another time. Could you stop locking me down with your legs? With your lovely skin, it's very disastrous for me to be caught in between those smooth, beautiful legs......"



"What kind of nonsense are you babbling about!? Blood drinking must come first!! After I'm done with your blood, cover up your eyes, then I'll fix my clothes and leave!!"

"Can we discuss this sequence a little more...?"

"So noisy, shut up!!"

Thinking about nothing but biting his neck and drinking blood, Rushella pressed her weight down harder to prevent Hisui from escaping.

The two were entangled tightly together, with only a soft bosom in between them.

"Hey, seriously... This is very bad......"

Rushella licked her lips and approached.

Hisui closed his eyes, fallen into despair, focusing his thoughts on trying to get his disobedient lower body to calm down at least.

Just at this moment, a savior suddenly descended.

The blanket covering Hisui and Rushella's lower bodies was actually bulging with something the two had not noticed.

" "Eh—!?" "

Under their surprised gaze, the bulge squirmed like a giant caterpillar —Then Mei popped out.

"Eh—!? When did you get here!?"

"I arrived earlier than this girl here! I was actually planning for a nocturnal assault when the time was ripe, but ended up oversleeping. So now it's dawn❤ That would make it a 'morning assault', right?"

"You and your damn assaults! What are you planning now!?"

"Oh dear, isn't it obvious? Let's. Make. Babies."

Mei smiled seductively and joined in intimate state between the two people.

Rather than a yukata, she was wearing a babydoll nightgown. This translucent underwear naturally held true to its excellent tradition of skimpy and erotic design.

"...So, could you move aside?"

"Who are you asking to move aside!? This guy's mine!!"

On top of Hisui's body, a battle between a vampire and an artificial human was about to start.

But before the battle could officially begin, Mei surprisingly offered a compromise.

"Or how about this, after all, since our goals are different, let's just split things up. You go ahead and suck blood from Hi-kun's neck while I enjoy his lower half properly..."

"I see... That's right, I want to get to fixing up my clothes faster. If we do it together, subduing this guy will be much easier!!"

"How could you two ally together!? Hey, stop it!!"

"No problem, just relax......"

Mei readily took off the outer layer of her babydoll and threw it aside.

Her well-developed figure was displayed before Hisui's eyes.

A massive bust on Rushella's level. Voluptuous thighs and buttocks.

Hisui had clearly seen all this before, but the stimulating nature of her attire was too potent.

In addition, hunting his lower body, Mei was crawling around on all fours... Like a female leopard ready to pounce on her prey.

But that was not all there was to it.

If it were just visual stimulation, Hisui could still manage and suppress.

But Mei had brought out an even more devastating weapon.

Hisui did not know if it was by chance or by design.

Perhaps God's gift or the Devil's sacrifice.

Her voluptuous butt was pointed straight at Hisui's face.

Fine, even so, he could still manage to maintain a shred of sanity. Desperately mustering his final strength, he resolved to turn his face away.

However, perhaps because she was spending a night away from home or because she was always thinking about having babies every moment... On her butt was what one would call victory underwear.

It was a pink thong.

The tiny scrap of fabric, buried in the valley of her posterior, completely failed to cover up the overwhelming presence of those childbearing hips.

Storing a thick layer of fat, that luxuriant butt was smooth and glistening.

Seeing the fatal object swaying before his eyes, Hisui's brain short circuited. It was a miracle that blood did not spurt out from his nose.

He could not endure any longer.

Abandoning a human's dignity and chastity, Hisui closed his eyes.

"...You girls should behave yourselves!!"

A cold voice made Hisui open his eyes.

It was... Kirika.

Indeed, he was not fighting a losing battle in isolation.

Isn't the vice-president here as well?

"Senpai, I'm so glad you're here... Hurry and pull these two away......"

As Hisui relayed a message for help, he instantly realized something was amiss.

Kirika's voice came from within the room, not from the door.

"...Where are you?"

"No, umm...... You see, you don't have a window, so I was thinking it must be quite stuffy in here, and wondered if you would feel thirsty, so I made some herbal tea... Cold tea. But I found you still sleeping... So before I knew it, I was waiting in a corner of the room......"

Kirika shyly raised a cup and explained.

She was dressed in a proper yukata with her hair coiled up behind her head, a great match for her Japanese attire and very feminine.

But what she had done was on the same level as Rushella and Mei's actions.

In other words... She had arrived even earlier than those two.

And was admiring the scene of his sleeping face all this time.

Hiding her presence completely.

Despite harboring no malice, she was even worse.

A so-called innocent stalker.

"No no no, that's terrifying! Then couldn't you have just put down the cup and left!? Just leave a note or something!"

"Oh right......"

Only upon hearing Hisui's reminder did she realize. Looks like the prim, proper and smart girl was a little slow in this area.

"...That makes sense too. Hey, look at yourselves, you two, what is with that attire!? A-Anyway, hurry and get away from Kujou-kun......!"

"Hey... Senpai, wouldn't you like to join us?"

Mei shook her seductive ass as she spoke.

In a situation like this, recruiting Kirika as an ally would be more convenient.

"J-Join you...... It's not like... I also......"

"Rushella wants blood, I want his lower body, and Hi-kun's face... is still free, you know?"

Kirika gulped after hearing her then looked at Hisui's face.

Her eyes looked a bit dangerous.

"Uh, umm... Senpai?"

"Th-That's right... This kind of thing, shouldn't be too direct...... One should follow a natural sequence..."

"You don't need to go mouth-to-mouth directly. How about the cheeks or the forehead? Senpai, you're a quarter British... This would only count as a greeting, right?"

"Th-That's right. It would be just a morning greeting......"

Kirika convinced herself and took up her position next to Hisui's face.

Then lifting his face in her hands, her lips—

"Hey hey Senpai, this is a bit... Clearly you were the only one I could trust!!"

"D-Don't move...... This is just, umm... A British greeting, just a greeting!"

"Does the British Empire really have this kind of tradition...?"

"Becuase you're struggling, you touched my lips accidentally, it's just an accident...!!"

"You did it on purpose!! Arghhh—I've had enough!!"

Hisui mustered all his might, trying to push the three girls away.

But he was powerless.

In particular—His left half.

"......Eh?"

A translucent arm was overlapping his left arm.

More accurately... His entire body was overlapping with a translucent body.

"T-Touko-san!?"

"Yes, good morning."

From inside his body, the ghost smiled innocently.

She was happily engaged in his possessed state.

"W-What are you pulling again?"

"Hisui-kun... I died before I got a chance to savor romance. Before I died, I thought I had met a good man, but ended up getting killed by a vampire."

"Yeah, my condolences... We're all doing our best for your sake."

"So what is love, what does it mean to grow up into an adult...? I'd like to experience that. Using your body."

"That's too weird, this is a male body!? Even if you experienced it, it won't be right!? Besides, what sort of love is this, it's clearly lust! Although Rushella's isn't even lust!!"

"I... want to become an adult!"

"Find someone else!!"

Hisui's pleas fell upon deaf ears. Touko continued to occupy his body.

Since his left side was not listening to him, further struggles were hopeless.

The sharp fangs buried deeply in his neck.

The lustful hand reaching between his legs.

The lips approaching his face.

The ghost sneaking in his body.

Farewell, my various precious things.

Before a drop of tear could slide down Hisui's face, a certain person entered through the door, accompanied by a familiar, cold tone of voice.

"You guys are too noisy. What are you doing early in the morning? Breakfast is ready......"

Seeing the scene inside the room, Eruru's face froze.

A group of girls surrounding a half-naked Hisui.

Rushella was also half-naked while pressing her giant bust against him, sucking on his neck.

Mei, dressed in kinky and depraved underwear, was invading his crotch.

Holding his face in her hands, Kirika was bringing her lips closer and closer.

Touko was leaning closely against Hisui's side. The sight was akin to lying in bed with a lover.

This hellish composition of a scene was completely incomprehensible to Eruru, plunging her mind into a crashed state.

However, her mind quickly recovered. Picking up a nearby pillow, she took out her favorite sacred gun "Argentum" from her yukata and aimed the muzzle at Hisui.

"U-Umm... Kariya-san, so you really keep your gun close no matter what you're wearing... That pillow you're holding, is it meant to be a silencer?"

"Farewell."

"Hey, w-wait, I'm the victim......!"

Before he could explain himself, Eruru had already pulled the trigger.

With the bullet shot through the pillow, the true story was hidden from the other guests at the inn.

Several minutes later, a female server came over to move some bedding and discovered a zombie-like boy, beaten up beyond recognition. Hence, new anecdotes were born regarding this room with its shady past.

This is not right, I didn't do anything wrong, they forced me and pushed me down... The zombie, or rather, the boy kept muttering incomprehensibly, seeking help from others.

Scared out of her mind by his appearance, the female server rushed out of the room. Reportedly, henceforth, the room was used only as bedding storage and no other guest ever stayed there.

"This is great, this food here! Eating this 'Jap food' once in a while is not bad!"

Rushella essentially followed a western diet, especially with eating bread in the mornings. Currently, she was happily taking large bites and enjoying a purely Japanese style breakfast.

"Hmm, although it's very simple, they pay a lot of attention to the details. The miso soup is also tasty."

Mei was tasting the miso soup in small sips.

The breakfast location was in the reception hall. Apart from Touko, everyone was sitting on cushions in seiza posture, savoring the simple but exquisite breakfast.

"I guess I should make miso soup from time to time. It looks like men tend to like that sort of cooking."

Kirika savored the miso soup carefully.

Because her cooking skills were quite advanced, she spoke with a very serious expression.

"Breakfast has always been a casual affair for me. It has been a while since I last ate so sumptuously."

Eruru was enjoying her food with satisfaction.

On first glance, a harmonious atmosphere seemed to be hanging over the breakfast table.

However, a certain boy was far removed from harmonious atmosphere, sitting on the side solitarily, having his breakfast.

".........I'm never going to stay overnight outside with you crazy girls ever again."

Hisui swore with resolution in his heart and silently ate his rice.

Thanks to his constitution, his internal bleeding had stopped and his wounds were healed. However, the injuries from Eruru's brutal beating still lingered in his heart.

With a stiff face, he prepared to go home, walking towards the bus station nearby with everyone.

The bus was roughly half an hour from arriving, so they all sat on the bench and stared at the sky with nothing to do.

"It ended up fruitless..."

Mei broke the silence, sighing and hanging her head dejectedly.

Although Rushella and Kirika's emotions were not shown on their faces, one could still see some sense of disheartening from returning emptyhanded.

"Sorry, it's my fault for not remembering..."

Touko bowed her head and spoke with an apologetic expression.

Because she was already intangible and fleeting, she looked even more transparent when she said those words.

"No, this is not your fault, Touko-san. However... What's the actual situation, Kariya? You must have found out something behind my back, right? You chose this inn because it was already in business since a long time ago, right?"

Hearing Hisui speak, everyone looked to Eruru.

Eruru shrugged and glared at Hisui sharply.

"You are keen as ever. Yes, apart from the cheap price, I did pick the inn because of the reason you outlined."

"If you told us earlier, then we could have helped by asking around? This sort of thing is easier with more people."

"That's right, Eruru-chan, Senpai and Hi-kun aside, I would've helped you if you asked. It definitely would have helped."

Mei tried to help out, but Eruru did not appreciate the gesture.

"This was not an official investigation to begin with, so I shouldn't get others involved. You guys should just treat it as a chance to stay out overnight and take a breather."

"You may think it's appropriate but it's not fair to Touko-san. Fine, what are your results? Did you get anything?"

"...It's regrettable. I asked if there were any strange guests or weird happenings around the time of Touko-san's death... But it seems like they had no idea. Furthermore, there was a sudden bout of heavy rain lasting a few days back then. The sea was very turbulent so the inn did not have much business."

"Heavy rain......?"

Touko closed her eyes then and frowned.

With a complicated expression, she seemed to be concentrating and searching for some sort of memory.

"What's the matter? Did you recall something?"

"......"

Touko did not answer.

She remained silent, desperately thinking back, thinking back to the instant when she lost her life ten years ago.

No one tried to ask her anything more and simply turned to watch her.

What exactly had she seen or heard?

This was what everyone wanted desperately to know.

Finally, Touko spoke up gravely.

"Heavy rain... That's right, it was raining. That day... The day when I died...... On the boat, facing off against the vampire, it suddenly rained! The sea became turbulent and a storm came, the boat also... Rocked violently. That vampire hid inside the coffin... Probably because of that. Then the boat lost balance and ended up...!"

"Oh I see. A storm huh... An unexpected bout of heavy rain... But to be honest, this point......"

Mei crossed her arms and pondered.

All the others did the same. A moment later, Eruru brought up her viewpoint.

"Indeed, perhaps this point is not a decisive fact, but more or less, it gives us a clear idea of the situation back then. Touko-san herself has no memories of locking the vampire in the coffin and sinking it into the sea. Because she had already died before that. However, the coffin and her remains were found at the bottom of the sea. Most likely after her death, the waves swallowed the boat and swept it down under the sea. With that, even if Touko-san did not do it herself, the boat and the coffin would still sink in the sea."

Hearing her logical analysis, everyone nodded in agreement.

However, these deductions did not clear up the root of the mystery.

"Suddenly swept away by waves... In that case, the vampire should still be in the coffin, but the fact was he was not. Also, the coffin couldn't be opened from inside. If Touko-san's memories are correct, then the coffin suddenly fell into the sea and he didn't get a chance to escape. What actually happened......"

Hisui pondered the puzzling mystery.

Beside him, Rushella spoke as though she was looking at a fool.

"Speaking of that vampire, what a guy who has no idea how to take precautions. Not only did he have a boat but he also sailed out to sea, but he didn't think of enhancing his coffin?"

"By enhancing... You mean adding waterproof features or making float... Those kinds of enhancements?"

Rushella nodded in response to Kirika's question.

As the only "coffin" user present, Rushella seemed to have her own ideas on coffin construction.

"When we vampires sleep, although futons or beds will suffice, in order to obtain truly restful sleep, a 'coffin' is necessary. Especially when tired. Conversely, lacking a coffin would be quite a troubling problem for us. Combined with the loss of a supply of fresh blood, it greatly diminishes our power."

"After all, to vampires, 'coffins' are a device for recovering spiritual powers. Precisely because of that, they would pour in great amounts of time and money into coffin construction to produce a masterpiece to their liking. In order to handle enemies attacking them in their sleep, some even go as far as to install various traps and mechanisms."

Eruru nonchalantly displayed her great knowledge.

For the purpose of exterminating vampires, she had thoroughly understood these areas.

"Indeed, take my coffin for example. Not only can it float on water, but if you close it shut, it can also stop water from entering. As a vampire, one must insist on such basic requirements in our coffins. But to think that vampire would use something without enhancements and even bring it out to sea, how utterly foolish."

Rushella mocked proudly to display her own superiority.

Probably offended by the expression on her face, Mei shot her down.

"Yeah, perhaps your coffin is fine even if it falls into water... But what's the point if you don't enter it before you go into the sea? Clearly you got kicked into the sea by that Oogami person last night, yet here you go boasting."

"Grrrrr...!"

Struck in a sore spot, Rushella had no choice but to shut up.

"He's vampire at least. Wouldn't he have special powers? Like... In legends, they can turn to mist or a swarm of bats. Even if someone kicks them, they won't fly like a dead fish and end up in such a pitiful state, right?"

"Y-You're really noisy so shut up! What you say, can't be done!"

"Eh~~ Are you really a 'True Ancestor'?"

"Sob, sob sob......."

Defeated in the verbal battle, Rushella began to cry.

Hisui could not bear the sight and extended a helping hand.

"The special powers of vampires are inherited from their parents, or passed down from master to servant. Although there are standard issue abilities like physical strength and the mystic eyes shared by all vampires, other kinds of special powers must come from the 'True Ancestor' at the root of their lineage. Furthermore, each True Ancestor has their own distinct powers. As for Rushella, well, she's just a 'True Ancestor' without the powers you mentioned."

"Th-That's right! We vampires have different strengths and specialties!"

"Fine. Ah, but that means there's more than one 'True Ancestor,' right? I was thinking, wouldn't all vampires descend ultimately from a single vampire?"

"That hypothesis exists. But if that were the case, all vampires would possess the same powers, although differing in strength, so that doesn't fly. The entity known as the 'True Ancestor' is definitely more than one. Of course, you can probably count them on one hand."

"Well, that's true. If she really were the root ancestor of all the vampires, then wouldn't she be a married woman who have sucked the blood of countless humans, with tons of descendants?"

"W-What nonsense are you spouting...!? I-I have never......"

Rushella grumbled softly, sneaking furtive glances at Hisui.

Obviously, her face was all red.

"Didn't I say it was a hypothesis? Servants aside, I never got the impression you were a vampire who had a husband, went through the motions of baby making, or given birth to a 'pure-blooded' child. It's inconceivable."

"Th-That's right, even without memories, that kind of thing... I never did it!!"

"How would you know? Even a lover would be perfectly normal......"

"N-No, no, never!!"

Rushella refuted loudly then fell silent. She sneaked glances at Hisui again but he was just stretching in a bored manner.

"Okay okay, I get it now. So it's like this, apart from standard abilities, whether those various powers of legend are usable depends on a vampire's lineage... Master or parents, ultimately decided by the 'True Ancestor,' is that right?"

"That's correct. So perhaps there are vampires who can turn into mist or bats......"

As soon as he said this, Hisui fell silent.

A thought flashed across his mind.

An empty coffin.

A sudden storm.

Special powers.

A calm and composed vampire.

Also... Also—Hurry and remember.

Think carefully.

Recall everything that had happened till now.

Pick out the unusual.

There must be something, a clue missed.

From the beginning of the incident, search everything—From Touko's encounter, everything that had happened.

"W-What's with you?"

Rushella asked with concern.

At this moment, Hisui met gazes with her.

Then Hisui brought his face close, almost touching each other's lips.

"W-What are you doing!?"

"—I get it now."

Hisui muttered an answer that did not answer her question and stood up.

The bus happened to arrive.

"Let's hurry and get back. Otherwise it might be too late."

"What have you figured out?"

Eruru asked solemnly. Hisui had these special flashes of inspiration from time to time, she knew them better than anyone else.

But Hisui simply shook his head lightly.

"It's all speculation at this stage. I have a theory but no evidence. Perhaps I'm worrying too much, although it'd be best if I'm wrong and there's nothing. But looking at how unlucky I was this morning, I hope the ill fortune doesn't spread over here."

"...What on earth are you trying to say?"

"Let's talk on the bus. Before I explain, hurry and contact the Supernatural Investigations Section, anyone there is fine."

"Contacting them now. But what instructions should I give?"

"Very simple. Quarantine the 'coffin' immediately."

Chapter 5 - Awakened from the Abyss

From her perspective, this job was utterly inane.

The higher-ups had assigned her to supervise the dredging from the bottom of the sea.

Not too long ago, a vampire's coffin was discovered. With one turning up, perhaps there were more.

Furthermore, as soon as a 'threat' was discovered inside, the target must be captured with utmost urgency—That was her mission.

What foolish instructions.

The difficulty of capturing a vampire varied greatly with the target's level. That said, using the Supernatural Investigations Section's equipment, it was not impossible.

For the sake of research, samples were indispensable. Some people insisted on this viewpoint. Naturally, it was understandable.

The problem was that the research in and of itself was a joke.

Human evolution, contributions to medical science, academic pursuit of knowledge—These people's research were not motivated by such noble goals. Rather they simply sought a delusional but as yet unrealized dream sought by people in power across the ages—"immortality and eternal youth."

Of course, even if realized, this result would not benefit mankind but would simply be monopolized by those in power.

Wearing its latest guise as the Supernatural Investigations Section, this organization had survived to this day only because of people in authority who coveted the powers of supernatural creatures, most prominently the vampire.

But in reality, no matter how much research they carried out on vampires, they never obtained the result they hoped for.

"Immortality and eternal youth"—Obtaining it was very simple. Just give up being human.

Living only under the cover of the dark night, burdened by all sorts of weaknesses, feeding on fresh blood.

If one were willing accept these risks, then a human could easily enter the ranks of the immortal and eternally young at any moment.

However, clinging to their secure lives, those in power did not have the courage or determination to give up on being human.

Not needing to worry about an inevitable death, remaining human, staying rational, not requiring a diet of fresh blood, not even weakened by sunlight or crosses, living forever—This was the sort of ridiculous immortality and eternal youth they dreamed about in delusion.

Naturally, none of these experiments succeeded to this date.

One would not expect them to succeed in the future either.

If one wanted eternal life, just give up on being human. There was no other way. However, human existence was limited in the first place.

Although her direct superior never spoke about it, he probably understood all this in his mind.

Clearly he understood, but for the sake of his career, her boss continued to work towards obtaining immortality and eternal youth for those people in power who controlled the world.

And she too, despite understanding the absurdity of such efforts, in order to rise among the ranks together with her boss, she had no choice but to accept this inane job.

But reality was unfavorable and the mission ended up fruitless.

The second dredging did not bring any special results. Not a single decent object could be found.

Let alone a coffin, not even a trace of a vampire was discovered. In consideration of budget issues, the dredging mission was concluded.

Then all that was left was to return to headquarters and submit a report to the leadership, get things done before noon and go home—That was her original plan.

Driving on the way back, she stopped the car for a can of coffee.

As she reached to operate the vending machine, her cellphone rang.

She had recorded this number just in case of emergencies but the unexpected caller ID was completely unbelievable.

"...Hello?"

"Oogami-san? I am Kariya."

"The sun has risen from the west. Did you hear something from the brat?"

"Indeed, he is the one looking for you. Not me. I'll let him speak to you."

After pausing for a few seconds another voice came from the other side.

She recognized this voice. It was the annoying boy who was fooling around with the vampire.

"Umm, Oogami-san? Where are you right now? At the Metropolitan Police Department?"

"How rude. I am currently on the road back."

"Hurry and reclaim that coffin. Then don't take your eyes off it. If any situation occurs, dispose of it immediately."

"Huh? What nonsense are you talking about? Is it possible that the coffin would move by itself!? According to the analysis results..."

"I'm not talking about the coffin."

Hisui's firm tone of voice rendered Rangetsu speechless.

This boy—He must know something.

"The vampire is inside."

"...How could that be? The coffin is empty. You saw it too, I also......"

"Do you really believe that......?"

"......"

"From the start... You noticed Touko-san already. Before Kariya and I noticed anything, you were already aware. So last time when we met, you were not surprised to see her at all. And you even said that exorcism rubbish. Because you knew from the start that Touko-san was haunting the coffin. So even though it was empty, you still continued to investigate in secret. I'm guessing this is also part of your orders from the higher-ups, or you applied to your superior, right?"

"What a smart little brat... Even if that's true, so what? I've done nothing wrong. The fact is there is no vampire. A mere ghost, what's the uproar about?"

"You fool! You already made a mistake in not communicating with Touko-san. If you don't want to make further mistakes, hurry over to the coffin."

Saying that, the other side hung up.

What an annoying brat.

But his words could not be ignored.

After some hesitation, Rangetsu still rushed over to the evidence storage where the coffin was kept.

"Looks like the coffin holds some kind of secret. What on earth is going on? It is about time for you to explain, right?"

Hisui ended the call before the bus started. Like the trip coming here, they all sat on the back row.

As soon as they took their seats, Eruru impatiently asked about the truth.

Naturally, everyone else was interested.

"I don't have any concrete evidence. The only reason why I yelled at her just now was just in case, to be on the safe side."

"Then if what you are worried about does not happen, then it just boils down to an ordinary high school boy providing bad information without escalating the situation. Thank you for your consideration, but hurry up and tell me."

"...The first thing I found strange in the beginning was the first time I heard Touko-san's voice. Do you still remember what happened?"

"Yes......"

Touko nodded lightly.

Hisui wanted to touch the coffin—And she called out to stop him.

At the time, he did not know of Touko's existence and thought it was a hallucination. Thinking back, that was probably the first time the two made contact.

"At the time, why did you say 'Don't'?"

"Eh...?"

"It was just an empty coffin. Even if I touched it, it should be fine. But you said that. Why?"

"Why... I just said it randomly? Or perhaps... Umm... Maybe there's some kind of reason I've forgotten......"

"I think so too, you probably forgot or it's some kind of ghost intuition. Because you felt that touching it will be dangerous, you warned me. But why is that? It must be because there's something inside... That's right, because your instincts told you that. After noticing this point, I started thinking there must be something strange about that coffin."

"I understand what you are trying to say now. Since Touko-san and the coffin were together for ten years, her words must reflect something about it. But exactly what?"

"The answer is simple. The vampire is still inside."

"Impossible... You saw it too, right? I confirmed it, there was no vampire in the coffin at all..."

"So basically, he exists inside in an invisible form. At least invisible to the naked eye. No, it's probably impossible to tell through scientific means of observation."

"And why is that?"

"Sudou mentioned it just now."

Shifting the topic, Hisui ignored Eruru's surprise and pointed at Mei.

"Eh, me? What did I say?"

"The special powers of vampires."

"Eh, that...? I mentioned it, yeah... Turning into mist or a swarm of bats, that? But this has nothing to do......"

"Mist...? Hold on, could it be!?"

"Looks like you understand. Most likely, the vampire that killed Touko-san can turn into mist. Although this might seem like a very pedestrian ability for a vampire, it's actually quite tricky to handle in practice. For example, no matter how you imprison him—provided there's any kind of gap, he can easily escape."

"I see, so that's why he didn't care when I shut him inside...!?"

The memories of the moment just before her death flashed clearly in Touko's mind.

Why did he allow her to shut him in the coffin so easily—That was because by turning into mist, he could effortlessly escape through tiny gaps in the coffin's lid.

The coffin was not airtight by intentional design to allow freedom of movement in and out.

"No matter how firmly Touko-san closed the lid, it was unfortunately meaningless. Well, you could have followed the traditional method by inserting Eucharists in the gaps to produce a sealing effect, but he'll surely notice during the insertion process. Besides, you didn't prepare any, right?"

"Yeah... This point never crossed my mind in the first place. I'm so useless... It was all for nothing......"

"Not at all. You achieved your mission splendidly."

Hisui asserted in a rare moment with heartfelt emotion.

Indeed, ten years ago, things ended only thanks to her efforts.

"Touko-san closed the vampire inside. Then you breathed your final breath and that guy could have escaped any time. However, something unexpected happened all of a sudden."

"The sudden storm... Right?"

Hisui nodded at Kirika.

Did the heavens respond to Touko's prayers or was it simply by chance

—In any case, the boat was capsized by the waves and sank into the sea.

"I guess the storm arrived quite suddenly. With no one manning the boat, it sank very quickly. The one who really got frightened must be that guy in the coffin. After all, hated seawater began to suddenly seep inside, of course he'll be afraid. Then he would have realized... What a disaster, he had been thrown into the sea and was sinking. If he wanted to escape, even if he turned into mist, he would be dispersed once mixed with the seawater. That might not be a problem with ordinary water, but seawater was dangerous to vampires, only second to holy water. Once his body was mixed with seawater, he would lose consciousness and unable to reform ever again—Pretty much the same as 'destroyed.' As long as the seawater was still present, there would be no hope for revival."

"Whether continuing to hide in the coffin or choosing to escape, either choice meant suffering from seawater..."

Kirika and Mei, who had unwittingly provided the hint, nodded in agreement.

The vampire who had recklessly taken on mist form inside the coffin had no means of escape.

"Reforming from mist would not change the situation either. Since his body was submerged in seawater, it was becoming sluggish and his conscious gradually grew hazy. Very soon, he would enter an immobile state of suspended animation. A high-ranking vampire could probably break out of the coffin by force and desperately swim ashore... That's not impossible. But once sunk into the deep sea, there would be no hope. That guy probably understood his situation. Or perhaps, he didn't even have enough strength remaining to release his mist form. Seawater continued to flow in nonstop, mixing with his body. Hence, all he could do was maintain his sense of self and wait for the day he could resurface. Hence, for this goal..."

"He seeped his body into the coffin... Right?"

Eruru found the answer.

If his body in mist form was mixed completely with seawater, that would be equivalent to destruction.

But under the seawater's effects, his consciousness was already hazy and his body no longer responded obediently to his will.

In order to maintain his sense of self, all he could do was seep his mist-like body into the fabric lining the coffin's interior.

"Correct. But doing that would not prevent the state of suspended animation. Without solid form, without consciousness, that guy stayed sunken at the bottom of the sea for long periods of time. Hiding in the coffin. Then Touko-san must have instinctively realized this so she kept guarding the coffin. Because it did not require concentration, she did not stay conscious. After all, her enemy was no different from being dead. Until later... When the coffin was dredged up. Then Touko-san awakened."

"Right... It must be like that, no mistake. Although I still can't fully remember, I know... 'I can't leave that place'... I did think that at the time......!"

"After that, when I wanted to touch the coffin—she subconsciously gave a warning. Because the vampire was still inside. That was obviously quite dangerous. Also... it still is."

"After opening the coffin, if we had exposed it to sunlight, then our job would have been easy. But having taken it underground, it will not be moved out for quite a while. For revival, it would be an ideal environment."

Eruru also considered this point and frowned with unease.

Ever since the coffin was dredged up, quite some time had passed.

The seawater's effects were gone. Turned into mist, the vampire could return to tangible form any moment.

"If the vampire simply returned to solid form, that would not count as a threat yet. For example, it would be like a state of hibernation... He will not be active in the short term."

"But give him some slight stimulus, let him drink even just a drop of blood... Then things are over. Instant revival. Then to satisfy the long-suppressed hunger, an immense appetite...!"

Hisui hoped he was simply worrying too much.

There was no concrete evidence at this point.

Perhaps he and Touko were overthinking things.

Or rather, that would be the best result.

Occupied with their own worries, no one said a word.

Hisui's group hurried on their return trip. Regarding this unsubstantiated truth, they all prayed for it to be false, or at least, even if a tragedy was happening, it would not be too late.

Compared to the evidence in ordinary police cases, the Supernatural Investigations Section's evidence was completely different.

Because usually speaking, they were all dangerous items and required corresponding knowledge and skills in usage and handling.

Foci for black magic, vessels with exorcism charms adhered, cursed objects bringing calamity to people—In actual fact, many items would be better destroyed on the spot.

However, the coffin currently kept in a corner of the vault no longer required concern.

Obviously, this was surely something used by a vampire in the past.

But it was empty inside. In people's eyes, it was not a problem anymore.

Moved to this location, it was waiting to be destroyed.

Considering it would be easier to move for future destruction, it was causally dumped on the floor.

In any case, it was just a piece of antique that would not cause any incident. The earlier incident had already ended.

"Uh, the data... The data...... Got it."

The newly recruited male staff member had forgotten something and stepped into the vault.

Although he had gone through an induction course, his days in this job were still young.

His knowledge about supernatural entities still remained at a textbook level.

In fact, he had no experience in facing off against supernatural entities.

Hence, he was only authorized to enter the safest area of the vault.

Everyone had to start as a rookie somewhere. It was not his fault.

Leaving a document file on a desk was a common thing.

And that desk happened to be right next to the coffin that was awaiting destruction... This was pure coincidence.

There were no particularly special factors.

Only the number of small misfortunes stacked together.

That was all.

Ultimately, perhaps all tragedies came about this way in fact.

"Hmm......?"

The coffin's lid was not shut tight, revealing a bit of a gap.

There was no rule requiring lids to be shut tight. It would have been fine to leave it alone.

Actually, work aside, this staff member was not the type of person who insisted on a meticulousness in his personal life. Normally, he would not care about something so small.

But when he saw what resembled a human face through the gap, the situation became completely different.

".........!?"

He must be seeing things.

After all, he had participated in the opening operation. Not only himself, many people had confirmed with their own eyes at the scene—There was no one inside at all.

Nevertheless...

Someone played a prank—That could also be ruled out.

Even if someone could deliberately lie down inside a vampire's coffin, none of the staff here had that type of depraved sense of humor.

"Impossible, right..."

Perhaps he made a mistake in what he saw.

After looking at it for a while, he reached to touch the lid.

Suddenly he felt a sharp pain across his hand.

"Hmm......"

Looking down, his finger had a cut. On further examination of the lid's edge, he found blades install in several places. Careless touching could easily get hurt.

"……!!"

He spontaneously recalled knowledge about vampire coffins from his training course.

In order to protect their sleeping chambers, from a very long time ago, vampires started installing all sorts of mechanisms.

Of course, installing them on coffins was very common too.

Accomplishing dual goals of comfort during sleep and defensive ability was not easy, but many vampires still install all sorts of traps on their coffins.

As a recent example from a few years back, there was a coffin whose outer layer was electrified.

As for traditional classics, there would be poisonous needles or sharp blades for harming intruders.

Making minor cuts naturally did not deter enemies. It would not even succeed as a threat.

The true purpose of this kind of situation was to draw enemy blood.

No matter how deep in slumber, so long as fresh blood was flowing beside them, vampires would definitely wake up because of their keen sense of smell.

This was the most trusty alarm clock, capable of waking a vampire from deep slumber, allowing them to prepare countermeasures against stakes, crosses, garlic and other adversaries.

"C-Could it be......!!"

The man covered his wound and kicked the lid in a safe spot to open it completely, peering inside.

Inside.

Inside was a roughly twenty-year-old blond man, lying there completely naked.

A noble face of European descent, easily reminiscent of the homeland of vampires. That handsome face could definitely be described as belonging to a descendant of nobles.

The pale white skin characteristic of vampires was filled with a sense of beauty. The vaguely visible muscles presented a naturally magnificent body.

The most distinct characteristic was that pair of vivid red lips.

So red that his mouth seemed like a red line drawn with fresh blood.

Furthermore, his mouth was already stained with fresh blood.

The blood shed by the wounded staff just now had turned the originally bright red of the lips even more vivid.

"A-Ahhh......"

Shrouded in terror, the staff back away step by step.

He already understood the consequences of his unwitting actions.

The young man stirred slightly.

He slowly got up and licked the blood on his lips.

Despite being a man, the licking motion of his tongue carried a mesmerizing sense of beauty that was difficult to express in words.

Even the staff forgot to run away, watching entranced.

But this caused him to forfeit his life.

"Crap."

As he said that, the staff had already realized his fate.

The feeling of sharp fangs penetrating could be felt from his neck.

Blood was mercilessly sucked away, very soon exceeding the fatal limit. Then his life plunged into a cursed abyss.

"Tell me about the situation in this place. First of all, what is the current time? How long have I slept?"

A seductive and noble voice.

Faced with this terrifying enemy, the staff gazed with hollow eyes, telling everything he knew to the man.

"...Hmm, looks like my sleep was not short. That girl really got me a good one. Fine, you are dismissed."

Obeying his master's orders, the staff retreated.

His eyes shone with red light while fangs protruded from between his lips.

He was no longer a police officer and definitely no human.

"Let's satisfy my hunger first."

Eyes flashing with dangerous red light, the awakened vampire began to hunt.

"...What's going on?"

Returned to the Metropolitan Police Department, Rangetsu hurried to the vault and could not help but frown.

The stench of blood lingered in the air—Although she could tell that the amount of bleeding was quite low, given the special location, Rangetsu began to stay on high alert.

Following Hisui's instructions, she carefully approached the coffin—A sense of nervousness surged.

There was a drop of blood on the edge of the lid.

Then—A woman's scream was heard in the distance.

"Could it be......!"

Hesitating for only an instant, Rangetsu quickly made her decision.

Swiftly she took out her cellphone and issued orders.

"The MPD is in danger of a vampire intrusion. Evacuate all ordinary staff immediately. Prepare anti-vampire gear and standby at all entrances.

Perform this immediately!!"

"We've arrived... After running for so long, I'm so tired...... Has that Oogami lady called back? What's the current situation?"

"Naturally, not too optimistic. Let us hurry."

At the MPD headquarters, Hisui and Eruru were racing through the building with Rushella and the rest of the girls following closely behind.

The destination was the underground elevator reserved for staff that they had visited a few days earlier.

Along the way, they passed by a strange person.

A European young man with a head of beautiful blond hair. More striking was the fact that he was wearing nothing but a blanket casually wrapped around his body.

Furthermore, the instant they brushed past him, there was a distinct smell.

Unmistakably the smell of blood.

".........!"

Hisui turned around forcefully.

But the young man was even faster and bolted out the exit.

"That guy......"

"It's him......"

Touko spoke, trembling.

Her entire body was trembling from fear. She pointed at the back of the guy who had left and said:

"That's him... He killed us......!"

Hisui's group looked at one another after hearing her.

In the end, their worst fears had come true.

The situation had deteriorated to the worst case scenario. The enemy had awakened.

"I'll go. Since we're both vampires, there's no problem, right?"

Rushella was the first to assign distinct roles.

Mei followed closely behind her.

"I'll go too. That's more reassuring, right?"

"...Me too. Kujou-kun and Kariya-san should go check the situation on the police side."

Kirika added.

Hisui and Eruru looked at each other and nodded, leaving the vampire to those three.

"...Don't do anything rash, okay!?"

"All of us are more resilient than you. You're the one who should be more careful!!"

Rushella smiled fearlessly and chased after the vampire. Mei and Kirika also sprinted out.

"Let's go."

"...Yes."

Hisui and Eruru then went in the opposite direction.

Towards underground—the Supernatural Investigations Section's headquarters.

Eruru avoided the elevator and chose to take the steps.

One that was different from the one they had taken last time.

"What's going on?"

"During emergencies, the Supernatural Investigations Section also acts as a quarantine facility for imprisoning supernatural creatures. After all, the national capital's defense system's central hub is located upstairs so troublesome matters must be resolved underground. In crises, the elevators will shut down and the passages blocked. Under these circumstances, only a handful of people including me are authorized to enter from outside."

"I see... So emergency measures are already activated?"

"The indoor warning announcement being broadcast can only be understood by related personnel. This is currently a Level 2 alert, implying there are multiple vampires confirmed in the invasion."

"In other words..."

"A number of people have been bitten already."

Eruru bowed her head sorrowfully.

Hisui did not say anything but continued to hurry on their way.

"The next level down is the headquarters."

"Okay......!"

A thick defensive wall appeared before them.

After Eruru used her ID card on the reader beside the door, they would arrive at the headquarters—At this moment, they found several collapsed figures by the wall.

"Hey, are you okay!?"

Hisui rushed over.

She was a young female staff.

Judging from her attire, she seemed to be a clerk and definitely ill-equipped to handle a crisis like this one.

"Pull yourself together... Are you hurt?"

Hisui asked as he examined her neck.

On there were—no teeth marks.

Naturally.

Completely turned into a vampire—The teeth marks would disappear from the victim.

"Get away from her now!"

The female staff had begun to move before Eruru's warning.

On her originally gentle face, the two eyes gave off red light as she bared her fangs to bite Hisui.

"......!"

Bang! A crisp gunshot was heard.

The bullet accurately penetrated the female vampire right in the center of her forehead.

Shooting to kill a vampire required aiming for the brain or the heart, as well as using specially processed silver bullets.

Eruru's shooting was so perfect it could be used as a textbook example of liberating a female vampire from her cursed life with a single bullet.

Her peaceful expression as she leaned against Hisui's body was her only salvation.

However, the vampire's face did not last long and very soon, her entire body turned into ashes, scattering in the air.

At the end of their cursed lives lay complete nothingness—That was a vampire.

Even if they were turned against their will, this iron-clad rule remained unchanged since time immemorial.

"If it's me.. Being bitten doesn't matter."

Hisui said lightly.

Although he knew saying that was useless.

He also knew how Eruru would answer.

"...But if the throat is ripped open by the bite, death might result. Or from excessive blood loss. Let us hurry."

"......"

Actually, Hisui knew very well.

Who the most suffering person was.

Definitely the one who was forced to pull the sacred gun's trigger against her colleague.

A person who had turned completely into a vampire was beyond saving. If Eruru simply treated them as enemies of mankind—Then Hisui would not be assisting her.

The two of them silently reached the headquarters' facilities.

At this time, Eruru's cellphone rang.

"...Hey."

"Kariya-san? Where are you now?"

"In the building. I already have a grasp of the situation somewhat."

Rangetsu finally made a long-awaited call. Eruru answered with a stiff expression.

"The main combat personnel have gathered in the quarantine block. The detailed situation will be briefed there."

"I know."

Hanging up, Eruru told Hisui the destination.

"We are going to the place I took you there before. That can be considered the quarantine facility within this quarantine facility. In a certain sense, it is the safest place."

"Got it."

Hisui answered, then he turned around and looked back.

Rushella and the girls... How were they?

Mei was there.

And Kirika as well.

Yet the unease in his heart could not be dispelled.

"Wait up!!"

Rushella, Mei and Kirika dashed madly and reached the streets.

But the man was even faster.

In terms of a pure contest in running speed, Rushella and Mei definitely would not be at any disadvantage. No, considering it was daytime, Mei should have won instead.

But the man in front was extremely impudent, casually grabbing passersby and throwing them unceremoniously towards the girls. Combined with the power of the mystic eyes, he instantly created a barrier.

"That rascal......"

Rushella originally intended to counter with her own mystic eyes, but abandoned the notion in consideration of the effects on ordinary people.

As a 'True Ancestor,' she could easily use her own power to cancel the effects of a clearly low-ranked vampire's mystic eyes.

However, if she used the mystic eyes to oppose him, the people affected by opposing powers of the mystic eyes would suffer severe mental damage.

"Bastard...!"

Just as she hesitated, they ended up losing the man's trail.

Rushella impatiently kicked the ground but could not change reality.

"Hurry and calm down. Being impatient doesn't help."

"But... We finally found him after so much effort, right? And Touko too... Once we exterminate that bastard...!"

"My, you're really enthusiastic in killing your own kind."

Mei's question was not sarcasm but a simple query.

If she had been harmed, it would be different matter, but the only victim she knew was an insignificant human—and currently dead already.

"Her current state... Cannot 'pass on,' right? That wound... won't disappear."

"That I understand. I sympathize with her too and would like to help her. But... Isn't that guy acting like a typical vampire? If you reject that, it doesn't put you in a great position either."

"......"

Rushella fell silent.

Naturally, she understood very well.

As a vampire, everything she was doing was simply hypocrisy.

"It's not really that bad, right? At least... Since she has not drunk anyone's blood but Kujou-kun's, she probably has not experienced a typical vampire's feelings."

Kirika interjected as though trying to make peace.

But her expression was very serious. She did not look like she was doing this in Rushella's defense.

"But perhaps one day, Kujou-kun's blood will no longer satisfy you. Or consider another possibility, if you recover your memories, you may find that you have once drank other people's blood. In that case, perhaps your current relationship with us might no longer be possible to sustain, right?"

"...Perhaps."

Rushella acknowledged the possibility without any avoidance.

Because she also understood this issue very well.

From the moment it was brought up.

"Then very well. So... How should we chase that guy...... I trust we can leave it to you?

"Sure."

Rushella drew her short sword and carved a light wound on her wrist.

Crimson blood dripped onto the ground.

Mei and Kirika covered their noses to avoid smelling the blood's fragrance.

It was a sweet, delicious and seductive aroma.

Sufficient to charm all people, no, it should be all creatures.

That included all vampires. This was a power unique to 'True Ancestors.'

Once the inescapably captivating and sweet blood was smelled, not only cats and dogs but also countless small animals, insects and birds gathered in the surroundings.

Kneeling down to worship the girl who gave off crimson light, they listened to her orders.

"There's a bastard in the area who's a vampire like me. Go and find him. Tell me where he is!!"

Using the mystic eyes known as "Dead Aim," Rushella could dominate all creatures to enter her service.

Using her full demonic powers, she commanded her servants from her position at the summit of the food chain.

"Go forth!!"

The swarm of animals dispersed at her command.

Completely unconcerned about startling passersby, they simply began their respective journeys to fulfill the master's orders.

Favorable news was expected to arrive in short time.

Although this was not Mei's first time watching, she still could not help but marvel at the sight.

This power of a vampire to dominate others really was unparalleled, beyond reach.

"This ability of yours is still so amazing."

"Even if it were more amazing, it's still useless on Hisui no matter how much I focus and stare at him. But then again, if I keep staring at him, somehow he blushes and turns his face away, then he seems to agree to my demands!"

"If you look up to him with pleading eyes, try saying "pretty please, I beg you❤". He'll listen obediently to anything you say if you do that."

"Hmph, you're just a fake, how would you know so well?"

"My score as a woman can instantly defeat yours. Since he can't be your servant and the mystic eyes have no effect, then just switch to a different attack strategy, how's that?"

"I see... Fine, I owe you one!"

To think Rushella would express thanks honestly.

Mei scratched her neck in embarrassment.

"Is that really okay? Offering advice to a rival?"

"...I won't lose. Neither will I lose to you, Senpai."

"...Is that so?"

Kirika sighed profoundly.

The battle between the girls was also persisting currently.

"Hmph... This is looking bad. I never expected to run into someone who could use the power of the mystic eyes to this degree."

In a corner of a large department store, the blond, blue-eyed, young man sighed.

This type of department store in a major urban center normally would not have bugs, but currently, the floors were filled with an abundance of animal and bird cries.

They were most likely looking for him.

His position would surely be exposed in short time.

Whatever.

After all, his original intention was to proactively go on the offensive.

"Nice fabric."

The young man was wearing this type of silk shirt for the first time and smiled with satisfaction.

He had come to this shopping mall in order to find clothes and make himself presentable.

Running his hand through his pretty blond hair that was already carefully styled and fixed with hair gel, he left the men's clothing store.

Although he did not pay, there was already no one capable of stopping him.

Because everyone was dead and drained dry.

The dead bodies strewn around, looking like desiccated corpses, were completely drained to the last drop. This showed how insane the young man's "thirst" was.

Discovering an abnormal situation, the security guards came running over.

Naturally, they could not escape the same fate suffered by the people lying on the ground.

Calling the police was likewise useless.

The main anti-vampire forces of the Supernatural Investigations Section were currently in a severe state of chaos, unable to operate normally.

Wherever the vampire had ravaged, only devastation lay in his wake.

"Basically it's all cleaned up. Don't worry."

Rangetsu told them when Hisui and Eruru arrived at last time's isolated block.

An uncountable amount of ash was scattered all around.

This was proof of Rangetsu and her subordinates' extermination of a large number of vampires.

Undoubtedly, her capabilities were in no way inferior to Eruru's.

"Detailed numbers on victims... No, vampires are not yet available. Probably two or three remaining. They surely cannot escape the headquarters facility and the MPD entrances are already sealed off. Looks like we can clean up internally."

"Even if this counts as mission accomplished... Is that really okay?"

Hisui asked expressionlessly.

He had no intention of holding Rangetsu responsible.

In a certain sense, Hisui's responsibility was greater the moment he started getting clues from Touko.

"I believe... This isn't really the police's scandal but just an unfortunate chance event. But the important criminal from the coffin has escaped. Immediately after waking up, a vampire's thirst is definitely horrifying. He'll definitely drink people's blood without discrimination. Whether announcing the truth to the public or organizing evacuations, shouldn't you guys have other things to do?"

"Not necessary. The Supernatural Investigations Section's work is absolute secret. In a certain sense, it requires even more discretion and secrecy than public safety. Furthermore, how could the nation admit the existence of supernatural entities? We've done everything we are supposed to, don't you worry about that. And that vampire isn't a moron, right? Even if he has a blank period in his knowledge about the world, he should understand how to survive in modern society. He won't be killing indiscriminately."

"Hey hey, is that really what a police should say?"

His tone of voice was casual and laid back as usual.

But Hisui's eyes were filled with rage.

"Indeed, this is the job of the police. Maintaining national security, sustaining the organization itself. Talking about justice at every chance, aren't you annoying? Talking about being an ally of justice or whatever would be even more annoying. Even if hundreds died, as long as thousands are saved, you should count your blessings. Gains do not come without losses."

These were an adult's words.

Personal justice and an organization's justice, this was a principle that adults had to make a decision very early on.

Hence, for Hisui who was not yet an adult, it was completely unacceptable.

"Thank you for your speech. Then I'll be going now?"

"Where are you going? Don't do anything redundant. If you want to do that, at least wait here until everything is resolved."

"I'm just a little brat going outside to play so I won't cause anyone additional trouble. I just hope that my troublesome freeloader doesn't do anything reckless."

"You're troublesome enough. Honestly, letting those two vampires fight would be better. Trash like vampires, the faster they go extinct, the better."

"......"

"Oh my, are you getting mad? You really are that vampire's slave, aren't you? if you choose to hinder us for her sake, that would make you a criminal 100%. An enemy of humans."

"Humans... huh?"

Hisui repeated that word and glared at Rangetsu sarcastically.

For some reason, his gaze greatly displeased Rangetsu, causing her to click her tongue and ask:

"...What now?"

"Did you make a mistake somewhere? Not an enemy of humans... But an enemy of your race."

Rangetsu instantly changed her expression in alarm.

Gnashing her teeth, clenching her fists, her nails were digging into her flesh.

"You didn't think I'd notice? After all, no matter how much training you go through, you can't possibly send a vampire flying with a kick at night through physical strength alone. At least, it's impossible if you're human."

"......"

"Let's look at the current situation. Since we're dealing with vampires, you should be on high alert and arming yourself properly. Naturally, protective gear for the neck cannot be omitted and the mobile squads must dress properly for safety. But look at you here, you're still in casual clothing. Since the alert is still up, you can't possibly have changed already. Besides, you're unarmed as well. Without silver bullets or wooden stakes, how do you exterminate vampires?"

".........Shut up."

"Your fingertips are dyed blood-red. If that's nail polish, the color is too dull. There's also the stench of blood on your hands. You ripped them out with your hands, right... their hearts?"

".........Shut up right now."

"A supernatural creature with physical ability rivaling vampires, ripping out hearts barehanded. And resembling humans. From what I know, there's only one match. Am I right? Miss Werewolf, Oogami-san?"

"I asked you to shut up!!"

Rangetsu kicked the ground hard.

Maximum acceleration. A starting motion that even a world record holder could not possibly manage.

That speed was like a cheetah's, already beyond the realm of humans.

At the same time, Rangetsu's appearance changed.

Fangs protruded from her mouth, similar to vampires yet distinctively different. Her hand also turned into a carnivorous animal's sharp claws.

That was indeed a werewolf's appearance.

Rivaling the vampire and Frankenstein's creature as a representative of supernatural entities, this highest-ranking humanoid beast frequently made appearances in legends and myths all over the world.

The legendary sharp claws of a beast were currently aiming for Hisui's neck.

Before the sharp claws could pierce his neck, Eruru stepped between the two of them.

"Stop it right now!!"

She raised the sacred gun, Argentum.

A gun armed with silver bullets was a sure-kill weapon against werewolves as well.

"Oh dear... You want to protect him? What a rare sight, I was thinking you'd never fall for anyone."

"...Nothing of that sort. Hurry and stop. Perhaps his words are inappropriate, but fighting here will not solve anything. You should know my marksmanship very well, yes? Do you really want to taste the power of a silver bullet personally?"

"That's only if you hit your target, right? I don't think you've ever seen me go all out, have you?"

Although her opponent carried a weapon targeting her weakness, Rangetsu still laughed fearlessly.

Her hostility towards Eruru seemed to be even stronger than against Hisui.

"You've been an eyesore since a long time ago... Dhampir. Neither human nor vampire, yet sucking blood and murdering people. In a certain sense, even lower than a vampire. My race has also been decimated by your kind."

"...Vampires and werewolves are completely incompatible. Whether open war or secret struggles, conflicts vying for supremacy have taken place, too many to count. But unfortunately, I have no interest in that kind of history. Please go ahead if you want to exterminate vampires. However, if you or your race ever harm humans, then I will pull the trigger without hesitation."

Eruru responded coldly.

Just because she did not bother with matters of racial tension, she would not show consideration for Rangetsu simply because they were both non-human. This was Eruru.

"Step aside, Kariya. If she wants a fight, bring it on. I'll take her any time."

Hisui pushed Eruru away and casually stepped forward.

Although his face displayed composure, his physical abilities were naturally below average for a human. There was absolutely no chance of winning.

"You dare look down on me... After all, you just want Kariya-san to help you, right? Despite her cool and merciless exterior, she's actually quite inexperienced. Very inexperienced. So even her subordinates would betray her. In a critical moment, she will surely fire her gun to protect you. You dare speak so arrogantly simply because you know that, right?"

"If that's what you think, why don't you race against a bullet? You should be able to do that as a werewolf, right? Or you can't right now... Obedient dog, fallen so low as to become a police hound?"

"......!"

Rangetsu's eyes instantly changed color and shone with golden light.

At the same time, her clothes burst open.

Completely naked—One could say that but her chest and abdomen were both covered with dense fur, covering her body like clothes.

Most distinctively below the wrists, her hands had become like a wolf's paws with even longer claws than before.

Pointed ears, a long and blood-red tongue, a beast's eyes—A humanoid wolf, or perhaps a human who had turned into a wolf. Before his eyes was the monster told by legends passed down the generations.

"Turned into a beast..... Indeed, the moon's phase is sufficient...... You're seriously going all out!?"

"Roar—!"

Howling briefly, Rangetsu rushed at Hisui.

This was precisely speed that could evade bullets.

"Kujou-san!!"

In the quiet underground space, only Eruru's scream reverberated endlessly.

Chapter 6 - The Strongest Monster

"...Oh no, it's already sunset."

Kirika frowned as she surveyed the surroundings.

The sun had already set and it was dark all around.

A vampire's time of the day was about to start.

"Are you not able to contact Kujou-kun's side...?"

"Looks like I can't... Perhaps there's no signal. Hey, how's your search going?"

"...He's here."

While dialing repeatedly, Mei asked Rushella who answered expressionlessly.

Just now, a dog had come up to report the arrival of the enemy.

Although it could not communicate via words, the message could be guessed from the dog's frightened expression and the way it kept wagging its tail.

"Dismissed."

Rushella dispelled the mystic eyes' effects, causing her servants to scatter and retreat.

Insects, birds and beasts all dispersed into the surroundings.

At this moment, as though cueing a scene change, the man silently descended upon this park at night.

"Meeting you for the first time, 'True Ancestor', the pleasure is all mine. As one of the 'Pure of the Pure' descending from the lineage of 'True Ancestor' Elise Dahm Castile, my name is Fergus von Blitz."

He bowed respectfully, displaying noble bearing without showing any obvious signs of ulterior motives.

The black three-piece suit he was wearing and the cane in his hand were clearly high-class.

If he added a long cape, he would fit the classical image of a traditional vampire perfectly.

"Tidying up my appearance consumed quite a bit of time. After all, I was in no presentable state to have an audience with a 'True Ancestor' just now. That is why I am late."

"Stop talking nonsense! Besides, where did your suit come from? Since you slept in the coffin for ten years, you shouldn't have any clothes with you, right!?"

"Simply by following the rule of 'survival of the fittest', I have taken these from those people."

"I take that as saying you killed and robbed them...?"

"I don't quite understand why your anger is incurred, 'True Ancestor.' This really doesn't sound like words coming from one who rules from the pinnacle of the vampires."

"...How did you know that I'm a 'True Ancestor'? I haven't introduced myself, have I?"

"Because I am privileged to view your face and smell the fragrance of your blood. Although I have no interest in the blood of my kin, the blood of a 'True Ancestor' is as sweet and fragrant as a virgin's blood after all."

Calm and composed, he stepped forward with cordial smile.

Seeing his attitude, Mei elbowed Rushella.

"Hey... You know him?"

"No. I've never seen him before!"

"Maybe... It's from before you lost your memory?"

"Well......"

Rushella wanted to deny it... But could not.

After all, she could not remember.

"Eh... Memory loss huh......"

Fergus muttered with intrigue. He had apparently heard their whispers.

"Wow, a vampire's ears sure are sensitive at night..."

"It's all your fault for bringing this rubbish up. Hurry and shut up!"

"If you have any troubles, perhaps I may be of service?"

Fergus extended his hand elegantly as though treating a noblewoman.

His lack of hostility caused Rushella to feel troubled.

"...What are your intentions?"

"Nothing. Only... Since we have encountered each other here, why not allow me to assist you in your troubles... Although you and I are not of the same blood, devoting ourselves to serve the bidding of the 'True Ancestors' is the etiquette followed by our kind. That is all... Or perhaps, you have forgotten even that as well?"

"Hmm, but..."

"If you have questions, then let us find a different venue for you to ask. However... Those lowly creatures over there need not follow."

Fergus was surrounded by a simmering aura on the verge of eruption.

Perhaps due to the power of the mystic eyes, even the surrounding birds began to clamor.

Also... Without them noticing, numerous servants had gathered behind him.

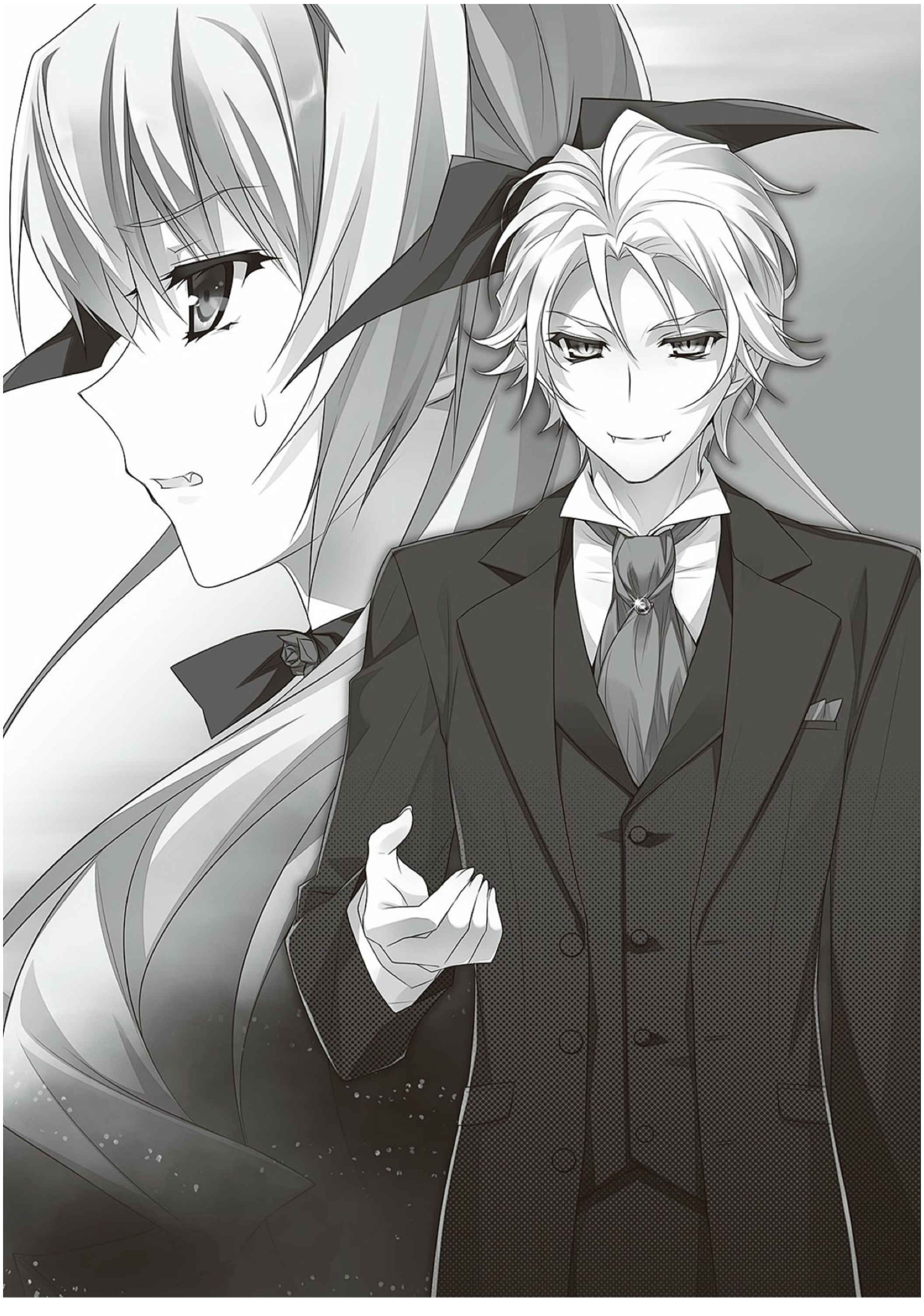
All were completely turned into vampires—The cursed bite marks were absent from their necks.

They numbered more than twenty.

Apparently, this vampire had sucked this many people's blood after he awakened.

"Bastard...!"

"These two are in cahoots with the little lass who pushed me into the sea. I can't possibly let that slide. Very well, let us not concern ourselves with these lowly creatures and be on our way. I know a nice shop."



The vampire made a violent expression towards Mei and Kirika while smiling towards Rushella.

Rushella had originally decided how to react in a situation like this.

Beat up that contemptible face and team up as a trio to vanquish the vampires.

However—Rushella could not do it.

Despite knowing this was wrong and unacceptable, she could not help but feel enticed by the proposal of this man, Fergus.

"...I......"

"Go if you want to, okay?"

Mei answered readily.

Her nonchalant expression seemed to saying that Rushella's dilemma was totally inexplicable.

"You......!"

"You're not thinking that the two of us are burdens, right? Go if you want to listen to his story, okay? But once you reach the end of your patience, just give him a good beating, okay?"

"......"

"...You want to retrieve your memories, right? In that case, don't hesitate.

Just act according to your own will but you must explain to Kujou-kun properly later. I don't want him to get angry."

Kirika also encouraged Rushella to go with Fergus.

She motioned with her chin for Rushella to hurry.

"Tell Hisui for me, you two... Tell him to pick me up later!"

Saying that, Rushella walked over to Fergus.

"Very well, I shall entertain your offer. But should you dare show any insolence or treachery, I shall instantly rip your heart out and decapitate you."

"As you please. Well then, please walk this way."

Fergus elegantly led Rushella and disappeared with her into the night.

Before that, his lips could be seen moving as he issued orders to his servants on standby.

"Do it."

Red eyes and sharp fangs flashed in the dark night like starlight as the newly born or transforming vampires slowly gathered around.

"To me, this doesn't even count as warm-up exercise... Senpai, would you like to leave first? I'd like to claim all the credit in front of Hi-kun."

"Who do you think you're talking to? Do you really think I would fear this kind of fodder?"

"Oh dear, that's exactly what I love hearing❤"

Saying that, a flash of light erupted from Mei's eyes.

The flash ripped through the darkness, a pulse of light resembling the sun in brightness.

The vampires that were struck by the beam were immediately pierced in the chest and turned into ash.

"...Did you just fire a beam!? Lasers from your eyes!?"

"Eh, I've never mentioned this to you before?"

"Even if you have, I'd still be taken aback! And what is going on here? Aren't normal bullets and lasers ineffective against vampires, but unbelievably, this one strike......!"

"Oh, I swapped equipment because of Rushella. This is a solar beam. By collecting the sun's rays at noon and firing them in a concentrated form, even a vampire has to surrender with a single hit❤ But there's a weakness, I can't use it if the weather is overcast or if I'm imprisoned underground for long periods."

"No one asked you for the footnote! What on earth is your body!?"

"Never mind that. Putting that aside... They're coming, okay?"

The swarm of vampires was approaching.

The two girls shrugged and began to face off against the vampires.

Vampires versus artificial human and witch, the battle began.

She only wanted to scare him.

From start to finish, she had no intention of taking his life. After all, he was just an ordinary human.

But due to his incessant instigation, going as far as to reveal her secret identity which she did not want to publicize, things escalated to this point. It was not her fault.

She had planned to simply make a light scratch on his neck as a warning and end things at that.

After all, the boy surely would not be able to react in time.

In fact, Hisui did not react at all.

Until her sharp claws touched his neck.

And pierced his skin lightly.

She had thought her goal was fulfilled but in the next instant, the boy stepped forward on his own, burying her claws deeply into his flesh.

"Wha......!"

Blood spurted out like a geyser.

Without a doubt, the carotid artery was damaged. Unless immediate measures were taken to stop the bleeding, this meant death.

"What on earth are you doing!?"

"Kujou-san!?"

Without heeding Rangetsu or Eruru's cries, Hisui took a few steps backwards, almost as though he were refusing treatment.

"Why did you... Do you want to die!? Hurry and receive first aid treatment......!"

"No need, I'm fine."

Clearly the pain was making him clench his teeth but he did not even press down on his neck wound to stop the bleeding.

Instead, he tore the wound open with his fingers, causing the blood to gush out nonstop.

"...Are you seeking death!? If the bleeding continues......"

"Not necessarily, you know?"

He resumed his forceful tone of voice.

After the blood finished splattering, Hisui ignored the frowning Eruru and showed the wound on his neck to Rangetsu.

"Eh......?"

The wound was still present.

However, it had almost completely healed already and was recovering at a rate fast enough to be seen by the naked eye.

Hisui's unique constitution, combined with the power that awakened only on the verge of death from blood loss, had greatly augmented his recovery abilities.

Anti-Drac mode... Activated.

"You're actually... a vampire!?"

"No, but my wounds heal instantly. Also, I become even stronger than you."

Within the blink of an eye, Hisui appeared right in front of Rangetsu.

Then he reached out and touched her delicate neck.

His fingers were long and slender like a girl's... Nevertheless, they would surely break a neck if they gripped forcefully. Rangetsu was certain of this frightening fact.

"Next question. Am I human, or a monster?"

"......?"

"I am human but with powers to rival a vampire. I won't turn into a vampire even if I'm bitten. What should someone like me be considered? The answer is simple... Whatever. Neither any of them, nor does it matter which side I'm considered as. Whether a vampire or a human, it doesn't matter. Naturally, the same goes for werewolves."

"......."

"Don't go calling others trash. No matter what kind of living creature, whether vampires, humans, werewolves, the only people who can call others trash are the ones who are truly trash themselves."

"You......"

"Continuing, second question... What is truly the most terrifying monster? The one asking this question was not me but the foster parent who raised me, a 'True Ancestor'."

"Huh—!?"

"Despite clearly standing at the top of the food chain, an immortal vampire with eternal youth—and the highest of them all, a 'True Ancestor.' Yet she was always afraid. Afraid of what? The answer is simple—Afraid of humans."

Hisui stared into the distance and lightly spoke this answer.

His eyes were filled with deep sorrow, causing Rangetsu and Eruru to show a layer of sadness on their faces.

"What difference is there between humans and monsters...? They're all monsters."

Saying that, Hisui walked over to the side of the room's entrance.

This was armored and made of heavy alloy as befitting of a quarantine area. Even if a vampire was rampaging, surely it could not be broken.

This was the kind of door next to Hisui.

And precisely because it was this kind of door.

Hisui casually attacked the door with full force.

Accompanied by a heavy crash, the solid door was covered in cracks.

Then Hisui lifted his leg and sent a vicious kick towards the center of the cracked door... Turning the obstacle into shattered fragments completely.

Then he left without looking back at all. Rangetsu stared and spaced out in the direction where he departed.

"...Who on earth is he?"

"Just an ordinary human. Like you... and me. Or perhaps, he is the one who truly understands beings like you or me. The boundary between monsters and humans... and respecting humans because he has seen too much darkness. However, he survived and continued to live. As a human."

"What are you trying to say?"

Rangetsu stared at Eruru and asked coldly.

"...There is no need to be too concerned with one's own past and origins. At least... That is what he believes."

"What pretty words. But in order to survive in this world, one has no choice but to play the part of a human. That is why I joined this organization."

"Indeed, you are completely right. But recently, I have begun to think that my current self is not that bad."

"You've been influenced by him?"

"...Who knows."

Eruru smiled faintly, her gaze following the direction of Hisui who was no longer in sight.

His destination was easily surmised.

Rushella and Fergus arrived at a French restaurant that exuded an air of high-class luxury.

A waiter opened the door and greeted them. Truly dignified.

This was clearly a pretentious act for creating the high-class atmosphere. Seeing the waiter's hollow gaze, Rushella could not help but feel a rising sense of disgust.

The man did not bother to pay attention to the customer's face... No, that sort of emotionless face had already surpassed that level.

Clearly he was being controlled by the mystic eyes... And at quite a powerful level too.

"Please enter and come this way. I have already reserved the entire premises."

Just as Fergus said, there were no other customers within this large shop.

There were probably customers seated or with bookings, but they were already driven away.

No, it would be fine if they were simply driven away.

It would be truly fortunate if they were still living as humans.

"Would you like a drink? I've looked at the menu beforehand and the red wine selection is not bad at all. Or perhaps... Blood would suit your tastes better? Regrettably, the only people in the restaurant are elderly men... I can't make any guarantees about the taste."

"...Not necessary. I'm not here for idle chatting. You bastard... How many people have you sucked blood from today? Controlled using the mystic eyes? It's not like I can't imagine the thirst you feel after being trapped under the sea for a decade, but there's no need for you to drink that much!"

"You are right. But as you know, 'thirst' on a psychological level varies widely from person to person. To me, those ten years were far too long. To compensate for that, I seek fresh blood. If I could take a bath in a large amount of fresh blood from virgins, that would be the best."

"What a revulsive fetish. For the sake of young blood, you attacked Touko and her friends?"

"Touko...? Who may that be?"

"The girl who locked you inside that coffin! After she died, she could not pass on because you still existed!!"

"Oh, that one......"

"What are your intentions? Revenge against Touko? But she's dead already......!"

"I suppose so. But that doesn't really matter. That kind of little girl, I was just playing with her to begin with."

"...Playing?"

Rushella's face was filled with rage.

Her eyes burned with crimson light.

"Indeed. As you also know, for our kind, sucking human blood is far too easy. Only because of that, various restrictions were imposed to offer all sorts of entertainment. Drinking blood over the course of several nights, invading a human's bedroom despite knowing about the presence of traps and guards, these are actions undertaken to maximize enjoyment of blood drinking. Naturally, you must understand that, 'True Ancestor'?"

"All... entertainment huh...... I see, that's why you didn't even remember her name."

Rushella clenched her fists tight and glared at Fergus.

But he continued unfazed.

"I have a matter to inquire as well. Before I reached an age of understanding, my bloodline's progenitor, the 'True Ancestor' was already destroyed. Rather, during the ten years since I sank into the bottom of the sea, there should only be one remaining 'True Ancestor.' I came to the town of Seidou because I wanted to meet her and seek her help to revive my clan."

"This 'True Ancestor' you speak of... What's her name?"

"From what I heard... She's called Miraluka. But unfortunately, she doesn't seem to be here. I was unable to gain an audience with her."

"......"

Rushella realized that Fergus' past was related to Hisui's past to some extent.

Perhaps Hisui himself had expected this vampire who had killed Touko to seek contact with his foster parent.

After all, it was only natural for a 'True Ancestor'-class vampire to attract the attention of her kind.

Even if they were not hostile, surely there would be plenty of worshipers and vampires with ulterior motives, hoping to use the 'True Ancestor' for their ends.

"Let me ask you... You're saying that apart from Miraluka, there were no other 'True Ancestors' ten years ago?"

"Very unfortunately, yes. If you have news regarding Lady Miraluka, please do tell me......"

"I heard that she died."

Rushella did not use the word "destroyed."

Instead, she used "died" just like the way Hisui usually treated his foster parent.

"...Then you are truly the last 'True Ancestor' remaining in this world. But where have you been previously? Ten years ago, I was not aware of any rumors to your existence. Very likely, all my brethren of our race are the same as me. Where did you come from?"

"No idea... I'd like to find out too."

Rushella feigned calmness but she was actually quite shocked.

Even in the past, ten years ago, there were no clues to her origins.

Fergus was probably not deceiving her. He really looked like he had no information regarding her origins.

"First of all, there were only a handful of people who drank God's blood at Golgotha and became 'True Ancestors.' A new 'True Ancestor' could not possibly be born suddenly. That said, I don't think you're lying... Besides, the fragrance of your blood belongs to a 'True Ancestor' without a doubt."

"Would you like me to show you the emblem displayed by my blood? That's another kind of proof."

"You have that sort of verification method as well huh... Ah, that's really too interesting. Please allow me to assist you in your search for your memories."

"...Not necessary. That's all regarding my matter, I will settle it myself. Back to the subject, what is your goal? What do you mean by reviving your clan?"

"Exactly what it says. Every generation of the von Blitz family was born from marriage between vampires. Naturally, our clan does not include any vampire who was originally human. All are 'Pure,' natural vampires by birth. We are one of the few clans who adhere to the 'Pure of the Pure' tradition."

"Pure"—namely, a vampire born from vampire parents.

Normally speaking, their overall physical abilities tend to be higher and they were considered more noble in rank than those who became "servants" by having their blood sucked. "Servants" were absolutely unable to surpass their "master." But it was not uncommon for pureblooded vampires to surpass their parents.

But even if a vampire were labeled 'Pure,' one or both of his parents could be vampires who were turned. Rather, that was actually the vast majority of cases.

Those like Fergus, to descend from a 'True Ancestor' with every generation consisting of offspring of pure vampires, this truly "Pure" heritage—"Pure of the Pure"—was rarest of the rare indeed.

For a vampire like Fergus to still exist in the modern age, it could be said to be a miracle.

"Looks like you take great pride in your clan. But in the current world, it's not that easy to meet others of our race, let alone an ideal spouse candidate—Another vampire that is 'Pure of the Pure' like you is probably impossible to find."

"Indeed that is so... Frankly, having failed to find Lady Miraluka, I was beginning to fear that my family's bloodline would end in my generation. However... You've appeared."

Saying that, Fergus' eyes shone with the light of lust.

Before she knew it, he had swept his pale white hand over Rushella's hands.

"...I still have not heard your name, yes?"

"A lowly bastard like you is unworthy of knowing my name!"

Rushella swung his hand away and glared at him with hostility.

She originally accepted his invitation with the intention of breaking things off.

But never did she expect Fergus to be such a repulsive person.

"How unexpected... But as a 'True Ancestor,' you should treat our race's prosperity as your duty. Please fulfill your duty."

"I'd rather our race go extinct than have children with you!"

"Oh dear... I never expected you to reject me outright like that. My original plans... were to start with a platonic relationship!!"

"Shut up!"

Rushella threw her usual shortsword.

She aimed straight for the heart. If a direct penetration did not kill him straight away, then she would rip out his heart by her hand personally without hesitation!

"Laughable."

Just as the shortsword was about to hit, Fergus' outline suddenly dispersed—He transformed his body into mist.

Turned into mist, his body dispersed like steam, vanishing instantly.

"This is your...!"

"This the power I inherited from the 'True Ancestor'. Apparently, you can't do the same."

The voice was near.

Fergus had re-materialized beside her.

"Bastard!!"

Fast as lightning, Rushella aimed her hand straight at her enemy's heart.

Since he was able to escape as mist, I'll hurry before he can turn into mist!

"...Do you really think no one else had tried that idea before? I'm already used to this whole game."

Rushella's graceful hand sliced through air. Fergus's body dispersed as mist again.

Then his gaseous body flew towards Rushella's nostrils—and entered her body!!

"Nnnngggg......!"

This was the feeling of someone clawing at her internal organs.

Invading her body, the enemy had infiltrated Rushella's various organs and was applying strong pressure from inside.

"How does my secret technique taste?"

"Damn it......!"

"Originally if my negotiations with Lady Miraluka broke down, I intended to use this method to force her to submit. Even a 'True Ancestor' cannot do anything if she were attacked from the inside of her body. Then after that, I can do as I please—"

A fistful of mist flowed out of Rushella's mouth and turned into Fergus' face.

This was the only part which materialized. The rest of the mist continued to apply pressure from inside Rushella, sealing her movements.

"Stop, this, now......"

"First of all... Let me start with this pair of lovely lips."

With a despicable tone of voice completely unworthy of his title, Fergus slowly approached her crimson lips.

Rushella tried to turn her face away but she could not move at all.

A kiss... This must be her second time.

The first time was with that guy... But actually, she had not initiated it on her own volition.

Besides, she had not treated that act as a kiss at the time because that guy was unconscious.

But there was no feeling of dislike at the time.

Although that guy lacked integrity and even kissed his parent—other women. She had hit him when she heard about it. But apart from that, she had not felt unwilling back then.

Although she was feeding him medicine via mouth-to-mouth, she had not hesitated the slightest bit.

But now... She was absolutely unwilling.

"Hisui...!"

Tearfully, Rushella cried out his name. At this moment, a waiter in the restaurant approached without being called.

"Sorry for the wait, dear customers. The super high temperature pumpkin pie you ordered has arrived. Although it's a shame it's overcooked, throwing it out would be a waste, so please enjoy."

Grinning, the waiter took the plate of steaming hot pumpkin pie and slapped it into the face beside Rushella.

"Argghhh, it burns——!!"

Fergus screamed awkwardly and left Rushella's body.

Although his materialized face was injured, he recovered immediately. Even so, having suffered a boiling hot pumpkin pie to the face, his cheeks still remained red and swollen.

"Damn it, what are you doing!?"

Fergus re-materialized and returned to the seat opposite to Rushella, glaring angrily at the boy.

Kujou Hisui.

"Hisui!!"

"I can't believe you ran away to enjoy dinner on your own. That's so unfair. Let me join in."

Hisui smiled at Rushella and grabbed a chair, sitting by Rushella's side.

"The situation at the police... Is it okay?"

"Hmm.. Kariya's there, it should be fine. On the other hand, what's with you here?"

"Your face... You turned into that again!?"

"Hmm... Frankly speaking, my neck still hurts. Maybe I tried to look too cool... Had I bled a bit more, it would be bad."

"Seriously, letting me drink is still the best way."

"...As much as I don't want to admit that, letting you handle it is the safest. Say, this guy is Touko-san's enemy, right?"

"Yeah, I permit you to beat him up! But you didn't bring that cross sword, is it really okay? Shouldn't you have brought it along?"

"No problem, I've already borrowed weapons from the Supernatural Investigations Section. Against this kind of bastard, the Tzara Blade would be overkill."

Hisui seemed fully confident.

With victory firmly in his hands. Fergus coldly glared at him and muttered.

"Trash... Disappear from my sight."

His eyes flashed with a crimson glow.

These mystic eyes issued orders for suicide.

However—Hisui laughed leisurely.

"Unbelievable, right? This is useless against me."

"What!?"

Immunity against a vampire's mystic eyes... This in itself was not impossible.

With sufficiently resilient mental strength or preventive measures over the eyes.

But Hisui was not in either category. Simply through the naked eye, he dispelled the effects of the mystic eyes completely.

This kind of constitution was like an unreasonable blow to a vampire.

Completely rejecting their existence.

Hence, he was known as—The Anti-Drac.

"You think you can defeat me like that......? Give me a break."

Fergus roared arrogantly and turned himself into mist again.

His gaseous body hurried over to a dead angle outside Hisui's view and materialized behind him. But at the same time, Hisui punched backwards, right in Fergus' nose.

"What—!?"

"Your presence is too obvious. A vampire who can turn himself into mist results in overconfidence in his ability. You're not even hiding your presence. Predicting where you'll re-materialize is way too easy. Although I learnt this from my foster parent, I never expected I'd have a use for it one day."

"Don't underestimate me!!"

Fergus held his broken nose and vanished as mist again.

His gaseous body went straight for the inside of Hisui's body.

"No good, you must escape!"

Rushella had suffered the attack once and warned from beside him.

However, Hisui did not heed her warning.

After all, trying to evade was probably useless.

Because Fergus' movements were too swift and hard to guard against.

He entered Hisui's body through his nose and mouth.

His internal organs at Fergus' mercy all at once, Hisui showed pain in his face.

"Are you okay!? Even with your body......!"

"Hmm... This is a physical attack... Neutralizing it... Probably, not......"

Although there was no tension in his voice, large droplets of sweat were appearing on his face and his mouth began to spit blood.

The pressure from inside was causing even more intense suffering to his body that was already frail from entering Anti-Drac mode.

"This... Might be a bit... bad......"

"You trash! Making me spend all this effort. Watch as I crush your internal organs and eject them. Go and die!"

A terrifying voice was coming out from Hisui's throat.

Occupying Hisui's body by force, the vampire attacked his body and did not neglect to taunt.

"With this, you can't even lift a finger... Taste this pain!!"

"Not necessarily."

Hisui retorted to the enemy within.

At the same time—His left hand moved.

With the enemy clearly pressing against his central nervous system, he should not be able to move.

"Impossible... What is going on!? Your will should already be......!"

"This... isn't me...... But a certain troublesome fellow possessing me."

Hisui's left arm moved freely.

His left arm was superimposed with a translucent arm.

This delicate arm belonged to Touko.

"It's you...!"

"Hisui-kun's body... I'm borrowing it for a bit, okay?"

"Please go ahead."

Hisui smiled and replied to this other existence in his body apart from Fergus.

The left arm that was the only part that could move.

Reaching into Hisui's pocket, his hand took out a corked glass jar.

Taking out the cork, his hand then poured the jar's contents into his mouth all at once.

"Poison!? Foolish, this sort of thing does not affect us, vampires......"

"Directly imported from the Vatican... Super high quality holy water personally blessed by the Pope at Rome. When leaving the Supernatural Investigations Section, I got lost and accidentally entered their weapons storage. Wondering if it might come in handy, I discreetly... uh, borrowed it."

Holy water—water that had been ritually blessed by a member of the clergy. Strictly speaking, its composition was no different from ordinary water. It was simply water from a church's font with holy properties.

Although it was a Vampire's fundamental weakness like crosses and garlic, holy water could not cause a fatal injury.

But then, what if a gaseous body were mixed with holy water directly?

What if an enemy lurking inside one's body were forced to drink holy water...?

There was only one answer.

Not to the extent of complete destruction, but the torment of being burned from head to toe by pure holiness.

"GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

A thunderous scream of pain came out from Hisui's mouth and echoed inside the restaurant.

However, the voice came from someone else, namely, the guy who was rampaging in his body earlier, now suffering a fate worse than death.

Hisui aimed a punch at his own abdomen, causing the "mist" to be vomited out without resistance.

Then the mist rolled under the table legs and materialized... Fergus was rolling on the floor in abject pain.

"Burning, it burns, it really burns——!!"

For an analogy, it would be like swapping all the blood in one's body with scorching lava.

As a fellow vampire, Rushella fully understood the kind of pain he was suffering.

Hence, she turned her gaze away.

Then Hisui spoke emotionlessly.

"Serves you right. You stayed ten years at the bottom of the sea and you still didn't notice? The greatest weakness of turning into mist is that you absorb moisture from the surroundings in the instant of transformation. Whether seawater... or holy water. Holy water of the highest class mixed into your body, doesn't that feel nice? Combined on a particle level, the pain will probably last a couple centuries. Oh well, I'll be long dead already by then."

"Bas—tard—! How dare you... do this to me...!!"

"This is revenge for Touko-san... Plus revenge for your bloodsucking rampage. At the Supernatural Investigations Section, out on the streets, in the department store... You drank to your heart's content, didn't you?"

A calm tone of voice, but at the same time, a voice of condemnation rejecting all compromise.

Scorched by conflagration all over, Fergus roared with blood and tears.

"(So..... what? You humans have also... To this date...)"

"Eaten innumerable pieces of bread, swallowed countless grains of rice, drank who knows how many bowls of miso soup. No one keeps track, but neither is there any need to keep track. However... As a human, as a higher organism above animals, one must always remember our manners and say 'thanks for the food' before and after a meal. Gratitude cannot be forgotten. That's how I was raised. If you can't even do that, then you're trash even worse than animals. Finally today, I realize that the word was invented just for people like you."

Then Hisui ignored Fergus and urged Rushella and Touko to leave together.

"...Is that really okay? Not terminating this vampire..."

"It's fine, just let him be. I don't know if it's fortunate or not, but all the victims were completely turned into vampires......"

"(You'll... regret this!? Once I survive this, this painful experience, I'll, surely...!!)"

The screams continued behind nonstop.

Hisui ignored Rushella and Touko's worried looks and continued speaking on his own.

"My, you'll miss me that much? But have you given any thought to what's gonna happen to you next?"

"......?"

"Obviously, those Supernatural Investigations Section people are gonna come. Those guys will sever your neck and drive a stake into your heart... Is that what you think?"

"......!?"

"I heard from Sudou and the girls along the way... You called yourself 'Pure of the Pure'? Seeing this kind of rare specimen rolling on the floor completely defenseless, do you think those people will sit by idly?"

Fergus' face instantly went pale.

Just as humans were only food in his eyes, those people did not care about a vampire's dignity either.

Throughout his long life, he had plenty of occasions to observe humans.

Humans were fragile.

Hence, whenever they chanced upon any opportunity to strike back at the strong, their sadism flared up without reservation.

"When the time comes, you'll be locked up somewhere to live out the rest of your life as a poor little lab rat... After all, you're a rare and precious specimen. Actually, it's me who told the Supernatural Investigations Section about this. Isn't that nice? Saves me the trouble. I'll let them interrogate you to get information out of you as much as they want."

"(W-Wait up......!)"

"Oh well, don't worry. After all, you're immortal with eternal youth. You can endure it, right? Even if it's eternal pain."

"(Wait up......!)"

"You won't escape a second time."

"(Please......!)"

"You will pay everything with your blood."

Minutes later, near the restaurant, Rangetsu was making simple records of the situation with Hisui and his group.

But since she already knew everything, the records were finished quite quickly.

Afterwards, Rushella quietly said to Hisui, probably still miffed about Rangetsu kicking her last time.

"I feel something strange about this woman. Her presence feels closer to that Kariya, right?"

"Oh, you can tell? She's a werewolf."

"What!? They still exist!? Eh, but it's not completely the same... The smell is not that intense......"

"...I'm half. Like Kariya-san......"

"You hate Kariya because you're both the same?"

"Don't simplify things that much. Our ways of living are different. Let me tell you this, as a noble wolf, I hold nothing but the highest esteem for my origins!"

"But because you're a half-werewolf, you can't turn into a wolf fully but only end up as a beast-human, right? And that bit of fur covering your chest doesn't look very safe. I wonder if it feels furry to the touch......"

"Wow, this woman here can transform!?"

"Yeah, her palms become paws after transforming. They look very soft."

"Wow, I want to try touching it! Very well, transform for me right now!"

Rushella innocently demanded.

Could it be that she actually liked animals?

"As if anyone would transform for you! Didn't I say that I'm a noble wolf? You can all leave now. Oh, by the way, Kujou-kun?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm seriously... Would you like to come over and help out on my side? If you want, I can even negotiate with the higher-ups for a salary on your behalf."

"Huh......"

"I-It's nothing to do with Kariya-san or anything like that, I simply... find you very capable. And this will give you opportunities to join the Supernatural Investigations Section in the future, you know? A contract for you before you graduate... Mutual benefits?"

The adult policewoman and werewolf was desperately searching for excuses.

Although she was not young, it actually made her seem quite cute.

But Hisui rejected her outright.

"No, that's not necessary."

"Why!? You're more happy... with Kariya-san?"

"No, I've already decided on my career."

"You're just in your first year of high school, right!? You've already decided!?"

"No, rather, I should say I'm already hired."

Hisui smiled wryly and pointed to Rushella.

"I'm my master's servant."

Instantly, everyone fell silent.

A moment later—Rushella blushed and pulled Hisui's arm towards her bosom, wrapping her arms around his arm.

"Y-Yes! You are mine!! Got that, so that's how things are!"

"Got it, yeah, I know. Stop it and don't press so tightly... I'm touching it, your br-breasts, and breasts."

"You're noisy so shut up! Hurry and go home, I'm hungry!"

"Okay okay."

As usual, Hisui led Rushella and started on their way home.

Rangetsu watched with dissatisfaction as Hisui left, disappearing into the distance... Then noticing the presences behind her, she turned around.

Behind her was Eruru... as well as Mei and Kirika.

Through Mei and Kirika's teamwork, virtually all the vampires were wiped out. Despite suffering a few minor injuries, the two girls had completed the task of supporting Hisui splendidly.

"Y-You girls...... What...... Oh, you two were quite amazing... Thank you for your cooperation, the vampire extermination mission was a success......"

Rangetsu wanted to cover up but it was too late.

Eruru sighed and shook her head.

"Yet another troublesome affair..."

"After all, I completely failed to consider her advanced age. What a weird way of courtship..."

Mei also looked exasperated.

"...Since you are a police officer, I am quite sure you already know that shotacon is a crime? Even with mutual consent, statutory rape is still a criminal offense, you know?"

Kirika pointed out calmly.

The three girls stared coldly.

"...No, it's not what you think. Except... Right?"

The three girls laughed at her denial and prepared to leave.

"Oh how the Japanese police have fallen."

"Hi-kun doesn't have a policewoman fetish, so it's fine right? I gained so many points today, I must win him over next time❤"

"Don't forget you had my assistance. But... Aren't there other opportunities?"

As the three girls sighed respectively to sum up, they parted ways and left.

Behind them, Rangetsu kept yelling but none of them listened to a single word she said.

"Like I said, it's not like what you're thinking, okay!? Remember this... Really, I can't get along with you girls! One day, I'll get rid of all of you!!"

"Hey......"

"Hmm?"

On the way home, Rushella kicked a pebble on the road side and asked, hoping Hisui could indulge her.

"Supposing... I'm, umm, a mother with children, what would you do?"

"Huh?"

"What if I had a past lover...... What would you do?"

"Uh......"

"Ummm... Supposing I've sucked many people's blood in the past, killed many people and made many servants, what would you do...?"

"......"

"After talking to that man called Fergus, I've understood a little. At least prior to ten years ago... I did not exist in this world. There was no trace at all. Probably... No one would know about my past."

"That's not for sure. It's just that they did not know you existed."

"But, compared to the 'True Ancestor' you knew... I'm different, right?"

"Well yeah......"

"As I thought... The current me is not my past self. There was once someone else and many other things happened... Then all was forgotten, resulting in the current me. Perhaps even my appearance and body were changed completely. Since there exists vampires who can turn into mist, my hypothesis... Is not entirely impossible, right?"

"Maybe."

Hisui could not refute.

After all, he was not omniscient about 'True Ancestors.'

What Miraluka had brought up in the past—was actually not a lot.

He only knew that the 'True Ancestors' had all lived for over two thousand years.

In a certain place, several 'True Ancestors' had been born at the same time.

The 'True Ancestors' recognized one another and had interacted to a certain extent.

Then Miraluka—She was the last 'True Ancestor' remaining in this world.

"Have... you ever thought about perpetual life and youth?"

"Huh? Why would you suddenly ask that?"

"Well vampires... definitely have many inconveniences. Like sunlight, seawater, blood drinking... But if you're immortal with eternal youth, it can be quite fun!? You should... know, right?"

"Well."

A long life was definitely a good thing.

But what about perpetual life and youth?

Miraluka—What about her?

"Do you know... Actually, it's impossible to prove that perpetual life and youth is actually forever, you know?"

"What?"

"Because, whether you live for ten thousand years or a hundred million, it all ends once you die, and that's not perpetual life and youth. Only by living forever can that be proven. So... Whether vampires actually have perpetual life and youth, no one can actually prove it."

Indeed.

A vampire who lived forever did not exist.

Even the 'True Ancestors' perished one after another.

Hisui's own foster parent had died an unnatural death in the end.

Perpetual life and youth was a vampire's characteristic but also a grand delusion at the same time.

"...That's just playing word games!? Since it's impossible, then why does the word 'forever' exist!?"

"Forever... Perhaps it does exist."

Hisui looked into the distance and recalled the final moments of his only family.

The parent, who died after being scorched and incinerated by sunlight, had said these final words before she passed away.

—The idea of forever... It's all an illusion. But I want to live on and prove it. I don't want to admit that the life of the one who died on the cross was correct. So, I will prove it with my own eternal life.

—Stop saying these weird things..... Don't die!

—I used to be alone. I mistakenly thought that it was the proper path towards eternity. Those who drank his blood together with me on that hill, all of them have perished apart from me. They had died not for themselves but for their descendents and servants. Entering relations with humans, falling in love, raising children, finally welcoming death. No one could prove eternity. So, I did not want to establish connections with anyone. I did not love the world like him. I would not shoulder other people's sins like he did... That was the oath I swore back then.

—Enough... Stop talking!

—But... Now, I understand. Smiling and passing away for the sake of others, he gained eternity for sure... His existence has now spread throughout the entire world. Humans always die eventually... Nothing remains unchanged perpetually. But if one could be recorded in history and remembered for all time... Through the accumulation of every insignificant moment, surely, what I seek must lie somewhere amongst them.

—Miraluka...!

—Through the changing seasons I have spent together with you... I have found 'eternity.' Those instants, filling up my heart quietly... That is the eternity I have sought throughout my life.

"I don't care about this kind of thing."

Hisui tightened his left hand's grip.

In order to stop his tears from bursting out of his eyes, he looked up and continued walking forward.

"Don't go dying so easily, okay."

"What nonsense are you talking about? Also... When did you start holding my hand?"

Only reminded by her did Hisui realize.

His hand had moved involuntarily.

Clearly, that girl was interfering again.

"Touko-san... has finally learned how to become fully invisible... What should I do if my left hand commits crimes without my knowledge......"

"Oh well... Isn't this nice? That girl probably... wants to experience this kind of feeling, right?"

"Maybe..."

"Say... Umm, I..."

"It's fine."

Rushella's deep worries were denied by Hisui flatly.

Hisui ignored her anger and continued walking forward, holding Rushella by the hand.

"I only know the current you. I can't be bothered with the past."

"......"

"If there really were a past, you could consider yourself lucky. With family, a lover, you must have been happy."

"But... Now there's none of that left."

"Getting impatient won't help, right?"

"...Yeah. Umm, a-anyway, I'll start with making you my servant completely!"

"Although I don't think that's really possible, do your best."

"You're noisy so shut up! Since you can't become a vampire... Th-Then using my charms... I-I'll enslave you!!"

"I advise you to save yourself the effort......"

"Shut up!!"

On one hand, Rushella was getting all fired up. On another, Hisui was completely unenthusiastic.

Neither side willing to back down, they continued holding hands without letting go while Touko watched from behind with a smile.

The terrible wound on her neck was completely gone without a trace.

"Thank you, both... for these memories."

Touko's soft whispers were heard by no one but herself.

Epilogue

"Finally, it's time to say farewell......"

After school, in front of the school gates under the setting sun, Hisui remarked with heartfelt emotion.

Everyone present shared the same feelings.

Ever since the incident was resolved, the wound had vanished from Touko's neck and her lingering regrets were released.

Her time to pass on should have arrived.

Everyone wanted to see her off but were at a loss... After pondering it over half a day, they finally gathered here after school.

"This really feels like a farewell."

"Hmm, the lonely feeling cannot be avoided."

Hisui and Rushella shared their feelings honestly. After all, since they were seeing off the dead, they both carried a solemn expression.

"Perhaps this isn't appropriate to say to a ghost, but take care."

"We will... Take good care of your tomb and offer flowers."

Mei and Kirika offered their well wishes.

Then Eruru summed up.

"You are an amazing person. Despite the great suffering, you still managed to pull through in the end. Please be proud of yourself."

"Yes......"

Touko maintained her smile throughout.

If she did not, she would probably be in tears instead.

"...These past days, I've been very happy. Perhaps even more happy than when I was still alive. It's quite weird, right?"

"I can't really laugh at that joke."

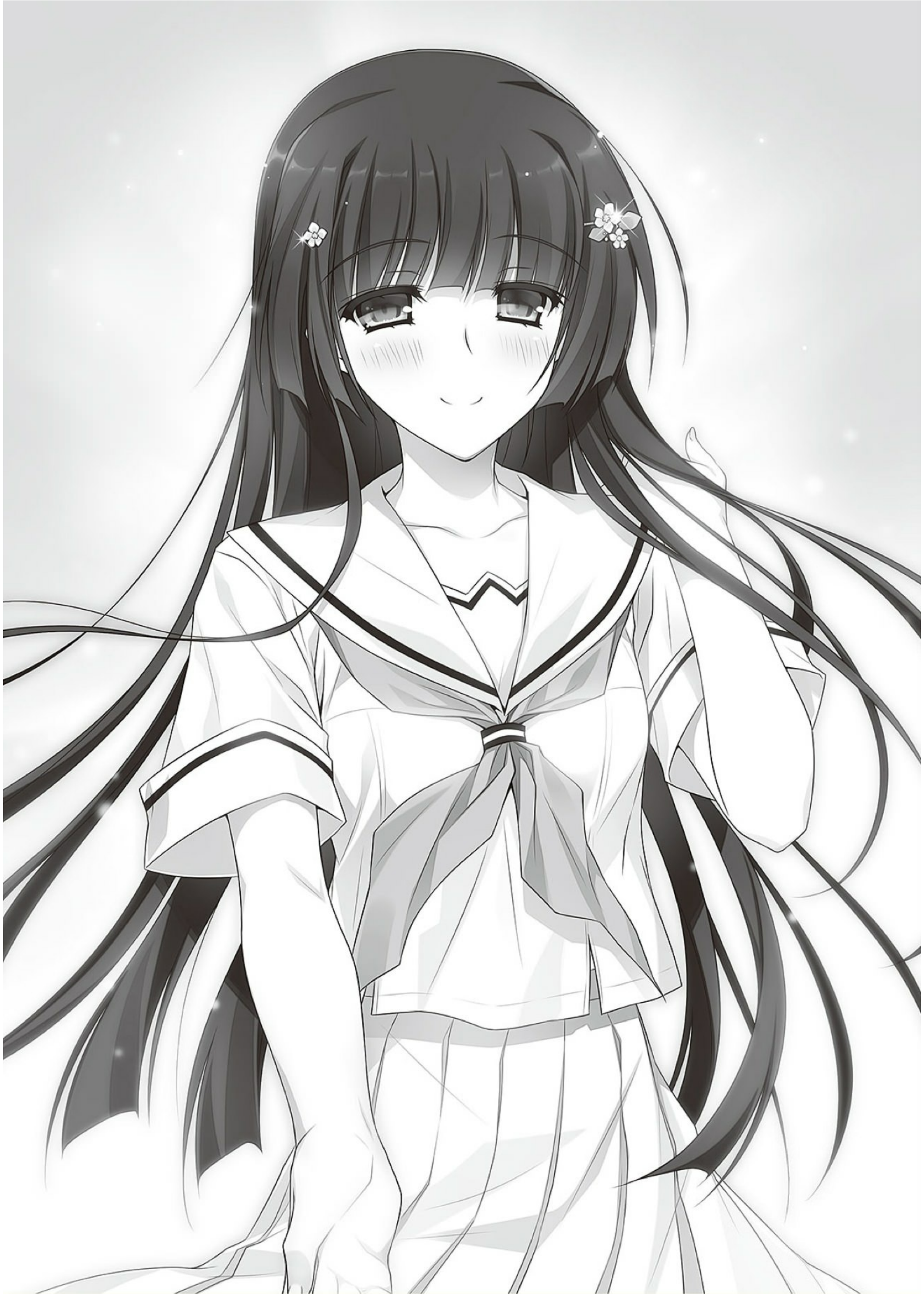
"Fufufu...... Then I should be going. Everyone turn around and I'll take this opportunity to head towards the next life. It's embarrassing to be watched... I might end up crying."

Everyone nodded and turned their backs towards Touko.

Once they all turned around, she was going to vanish.

Their ghost senpai from ten years ago as well as the one who had sought their help.

"Farewell......"



Touko waved and said goodbye.

The five of them also waved... Holding back their tears, they remained silent.

After the long and silent farewell, everyone turned around.

At this moment, the setting sun shone upon their faces.

Touko was no longer present.

Vanished.

Gone to the afterlife.

That was the way things were supposed to go.

After all the preparations.

The mood was also totally brought out.

But in the shadows of the school gates, hiding from everyone, twiddling her fingers at a loss, a translucent and beautiful girl was furtively looking over at them. Was that Hisui's imagination or just someone who looked similar?

"Uh......"

Amidst the awkward atmosphere, Hisui went over and brought Touko out from her hiding place and led her before everyone.

"Excuse me... Touko-san?"

"S-Sorry......"

She seemed to realize she had committed a serious crime.

Touko's eyes were tearful but those tears were clearly not because she was touched.

"It's a bit hard to bring this up... But how does one pass on......?"

"Uh, well... It should come naturally... Rising up towards heaven, slowly disappearing into the air......"

"I'm afraid of heights..."

Saying that, Touko was about to cry.

Indeed, rising up into heaven might be a bit difficult for someone with a fear of heights... However.

"Say, Touko-san, you should not have any lingering regrets, right? The incident is all resolved... Could there be more regrets you have remaining from your life?"

The expert, Eruru, asked.

Indeed, the problem probably lay in eliminating those lingering attachments.

"Lemme see... I've always wanted to eat all the crepes in one go at the crepe shop near the station without worrying about my weight... Also ice cream at the cafe! Also there's that, the dozen or so little charms I've always wanted to try out, such as having a happy marriage in the future... Oh, I still want a boyfriend! I've never met one during my life... After I get a boyfriend, I'd like to prepare handmade lunchboxes for him, go out on dates, etc......"

......If they continued to listen, she would probably talk all the way till the next morning. Exasperated, Hisui asked Eruru:

"So... What should we do now?"

"...In any case, I think we should just observe for now. Since she has done good deeds, we cannot just exorcise her."

"In the end, this development occurred?"

"In the end, this development occurred."

"Then I'll continue living at Hisui-kun's house!? Oh yeah, I've also looked forward to cohabitation......"

Touko was ecstatic.

At least, none of the items on her wish list included passing on.

Hisui and Rushella silently exchanged glances and nodded together.

Standing in front of Kirika at the same time, they bowed their heads in unison.

" "Senpai, we're relying on you." "

The next day.

An intricate magic circle was carved on a certain desk in an empty classroom.

Although it pained one to damage school property, for the sake of a certain student, there was no choice.

After all, that student had already died ten years ago.

"Hey hey, this is so mean! You're going to force me to live in this room!? Drawing this kind of magic circle to affix me to this desk!!"

"Don't worry, this desk is simply one of many foci in the entire school for anchoring your existence. Similar foci are located in other places in school so you can move around freely within the grounds."

At Hisui and Rushella's request, Kirika had separated Touko from Hisui's body.

Hence, she had now legitimately anchored the existence of this earth-bound spirit to the school, allowing her to begin a new life.

Even though she was already dead.

"So mean... Then I can't experience romance like this!? Hisui-kun, I guess I'm not attractive enough!?"

"Hmm, you're already dead so that's out of the question. Better luck in your next life."

"Sob sob~~"

Ignoring the sorrowful Touko, the aimless club activities started up as usual today, centered on the club president.

"Don't worry, Touko. One day, I will help you to pass on properly! Okay, we have a new member. From now on, you too shall devote your utmost efforts to recovering my memory and improving the quality of my bloodsucking life!"

"I really hate nodding and agreeing every time I hear that sentence......"

Hisui retorted against Rushella's declaration as he welcomed the newest club member.

"So, I'll be in your care, Hisui-kun. Until I pass on."

"...Yeah."

However, shaking hands was still not possible.

Because his hand passed through.

Hence there was no way to hold firmly.

Literally a ghost member of the club, Fuwa Touko.

With a list of worldly attachments so numerous that she could chatter about endlessly, the day of her passing on seemed forever distant.

Afterword

Hello everyone, I am Totsuki.

Coming up next is a spoiler about this volume's story, so please be careful.

The newest character in this volume is the most devilish in everyday life in a certain sense and might even be something that dear readers have encountered.

As a side note, I have no paranormal senses at all so I've never had any experiences in this area.

Neither have I visited places rumored to have paranormal phenomena.

Perhaps it serves me right, after all, I seldom pay respects at my ancestors' tombs either, so I've never had a chance to encounter them. Naturally, I have no wish of encountering them either.

In fact, more fundamentally, I'm afraid of horrifying things.

Although I'm very scared, the main characters I write about are completely opposite. Instead, they are characters who either possess the same superpowers or can defeat monsters directly.

When going to video rentals, I don't really like going near the special shelves for that genre.

But when I pass by, I check out the box out of curiosity.

Yes, it happens almost exactly the same as with Rushella.

As soon as I look at the box I begin to regret it.

Occasionally, I would pop it into the player and feel like dying when it finishes with a bad ending.

So, as a child, I basically watched horror films while hiding behind my father's back.

Yeah, it's quite similar to Rushella in the story, although my appearance is worlds apart from hers.

Oh right, my father was totally unafraid of ghosts and monsters.

In his words, that's because he knew what was truly the most terrifying.

My father always spoke in a very direct and upfront manner and never said anything resembling famous quotes. But for some reason, these words of his left a deep impression on me, and I used it as this story's theme.

What is the scariest monster?

Hisui did not fear Rushella and the other girls and even treated them as ordinary people and got along, perhaps because he knew the answer to that question.

Oh well, for a scaredy-cat like me, whether the most scary or the second scary, or even not scary, in any case, horrifying things, please stay away from me.

Because it's very scary, after all.

Also, currently, the most scary things are deadlines and failure to get reader support.

In that case, fictional monsters created by humans are not worth fearing at all.

Even with that notion, I still ignore the horror section when walking past it in the rental shop. Seeing psychic shows on television, I silently switch off the TV.

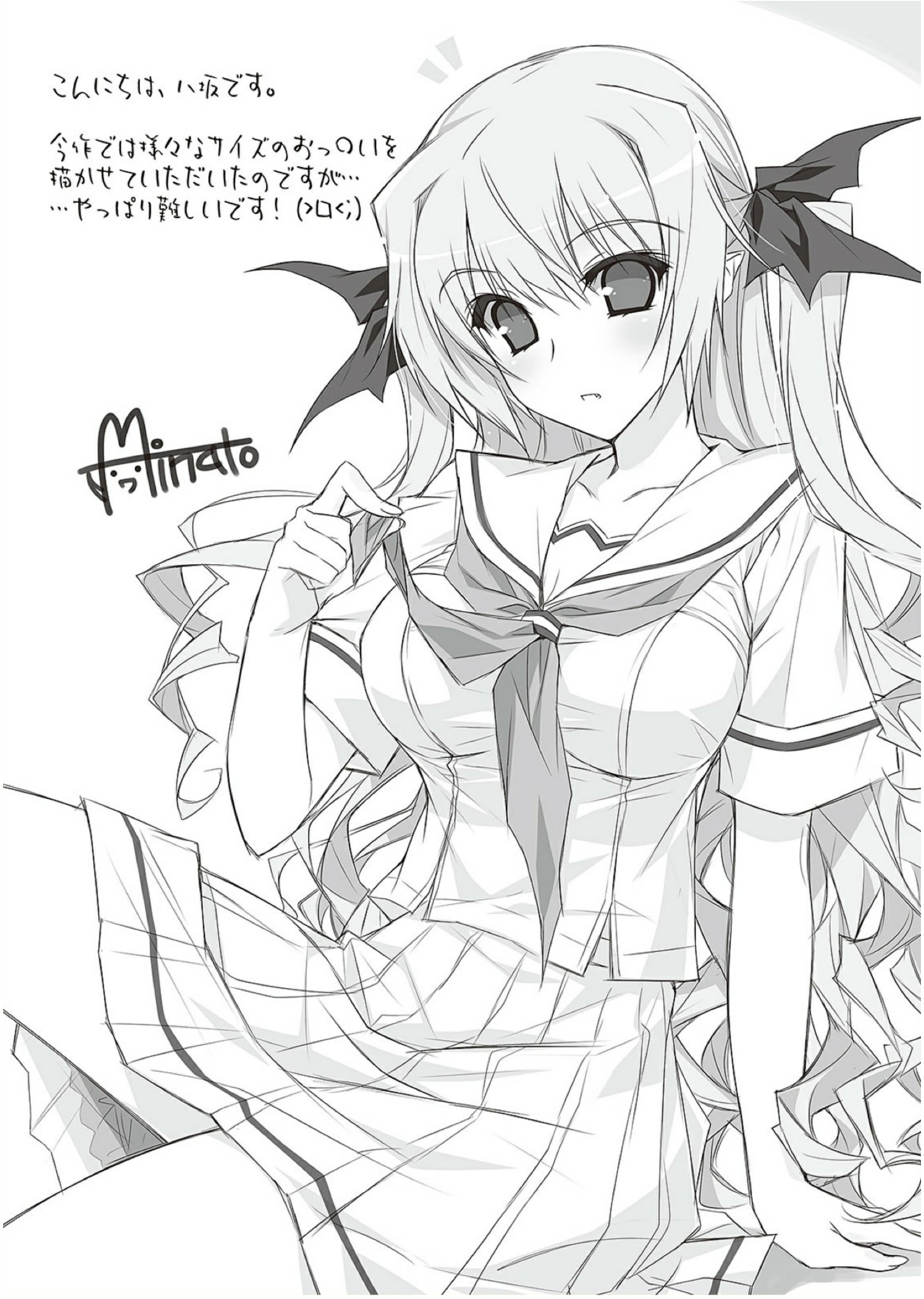
A man with a clear conscience has nothing to fear.

In order to dispel the lingering fear in my heart, I will have Hisui try his very best.

If it's him, he should be able to face any situation calmly.

What sort of suffering will he face next time? Please look forward to it, everyone.

Illustrator's Afterword


こんにちは、八坂です。
今作では様々なサイズのおっ〇いを
描かせていただいたのですが…
…やっぱり難しいです！(>ロ<;)
Minato

Hello everyone, I am Yasaka.

For this volume, I had to draw bosoms of various sizes... It's actually quite tough!

十月ユウ

銀の十字架（クロス）とドラキュリア

Silver Cross & Draculea

Ⅳ

ファンタジア文庫

銀の十字架（クロス）とドラキュリア
Silver Cross & Draculea
IV

せられいな
世羅玲奈
私が生まれたのは、
トラウマだけじゃなく、
きっとあなたのせい
ルシュラ＝ダーム
・ドラキュリア

Prologue

"Let me do it!"

During afternoon homeroom, the girl raised her pale arm proudly and declared.

All her classmates' attentions were drawn to this young otherworldly beauty who was completely flawless in appearance only—Rushella Dahm Draculea.

Perhaps she enjoyed being the center of attention, Rushella crossed her arms and nodded with satisfaction. Then greatly pleased, she asked the boy next to her:

"So hurry up and tell me, Hisui, what does 'relay' and 'final leg' actually mean!?"

"You raised your hand without knowing what it was about..."

Although this was well within expectation, Hisui still could not help but retort with a suffering expression.

Indeed, today's homeroom discussion was about the upcoming sports festival's various matters.

The distribution of various chores during the festival, confirmation of participating events, deciding on the future schedule—These were all being decided smoothly except for the final debate.

The final debate involved designating Rushella as the final leg runner for the relay race that she had just volunteered for.

Hisui originally thought the class only needed to pick a few participants to enter the race, but it turned out that all members of the class were obliged to participate.

Putting the issue of ordering aside, apparently not just Rushella but also Hisui had to take part.

"Say, what's with this kind of troublesome event...? Shouldn't this type of event be limited to the third years? ...It's not like this could serve as our graduation memories. This would only create mental trauma for the slowpokes."

"What are you rambling about incomprehensibly!? I'm asking you, what does 'final leg' mean exactly!?"

"...The last runner in a relay race. The person who gets the most attention and wins the most applause. Depending on the result, you'll either be seen as a great hero or a great sinner."

Hisui explained this cruel and unwritten rule of the sports festival.

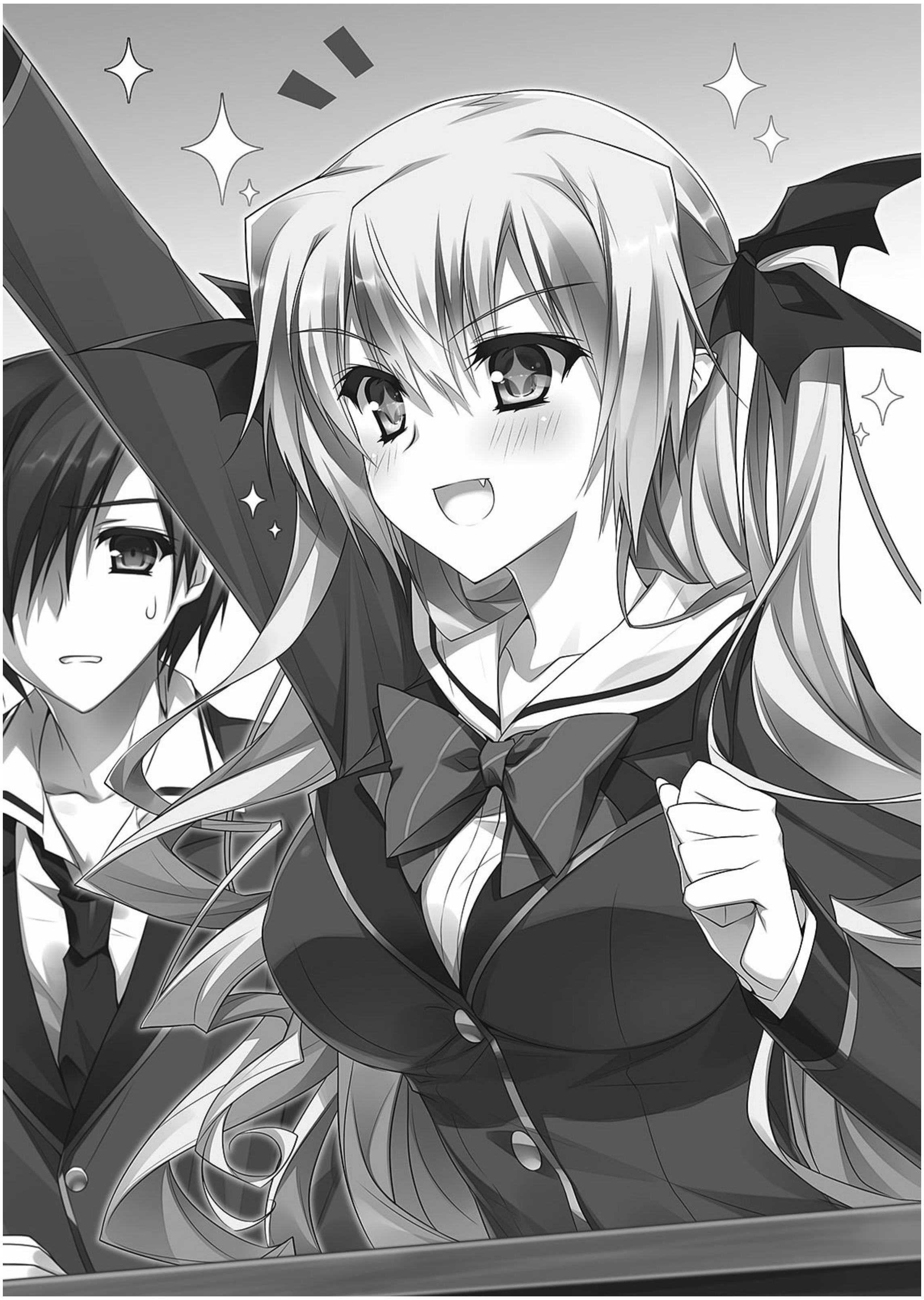
But to an optimist like Rushella, this warning basically fell on deaf ears.

Seeing her eyes flash brightly, clearly she only heard the first half of his explanation.

"I see, then isn't this kind of role created just for me! Very well! Class Rep, let me do it!"

Before Hisui could stop her, she raised her hand up high and announced.

In charge of the class discussion, Sera Reina looked awkwardly at Hisui to seek his judgment.



In these kinds of situations, she always felt it was best to delegate the decision to Hisui who understood Rushella the best.

Hisui could only sigh and offer sound advice.

"Come on, stop it. Besides, the sports festival is held during daytime.

Simply participating will be dangerous for you, okay?"

Hisui calmly hinted at Rushella's weakness as a vampire.

Due to her fear of sunlight, she always observed rather than participated in PE class.

She could use her vampire physical abilities to show off during indoor events, but unfortunately, there was no stage for her to shine in the sports festival.

The classmates and PE teacher were deceived using the excuse of a bodily condition of sensitive skin... which was not entirely a lie.

Currently, everyone's gaze seemed to be asking her not to act tough... It looked like no one doubted the lie at all.

"...So, let's choose someone else for the final leg. Please continue, Class Rep."

At Reina's request, Hisui released Rushella from the center of the debate.

Although Rushella sat down, naturally, she was not pleased with Hisui at all.

"Why not!? What does it matter!? If it's sunlight, just ask 'Senpai' for help again...!"

"Listen to how strange you sound. And it's not like you should rely on others so much. After all, she has her own life."

Hisui was worrying for a certain unofficial club member—Uno Kirika.

Using her skills as a "witch," she was able to make a light-blocking agent for vampires to screen out sunlight.

But naturally, that required a lot of effort and also involved practical matters like money.

"...Besides, even if you use that, you're still only at your daytime level, right? Maybe you're top among ordinary high school students, but against the track and field club's specialized sprinters, it's not so clear cut anymore... But then again, our school's athletic clubs aren't particularly strong, so you should be winning without a doubt."

"What does it matter!?"

"Of course it matters."

In any case, Hisui did not want Rushella to stand out too much.

Everything stemmed from this principle.

After all, her beauty was already superb. Attracting the attention of all teachers, students, parents and visitors could very well end up causing trouble.

"Mmmmmm.... What does it matter!? I'm just going for a run..."

"No."

Hisui tried his best to handle this problem child and let the homeroom discussion continue.

Excluding Rushella, everyone else hoped to select a candidate that they all approved.

In theory, boys from the track and field club would be the best candidates.

However, although Hisui's class had track and field students, none of them were boys specializing in sprinting.

Compared to the entire year group, there were a few boys in the class who were especially fast, but one of them was already selected as the first runner and could not take the final leg as well. He was sitting by the window, staring outside with disinterest, clearly with no intention to swap his spot.

This meant choosing from the remaining candidates... But no one apparently wanted to take on this heavy responsibility.

Actually, Hisui had no right to judge others, after all, he himself was trying his hardest to avoid the burden too.

Just as everyone hesitated, a boy in the first row closest to the black board spoke up.

His name was something like Kuroda—A speedy guy from the baseball club. Probably the best candidate for the final leg. His refreshingly short hair and deeply tanned skin left others with a deep impression.

"Say, this spot doesn't have to be a boy, right? Since it's a mixed-gender event in the first place, it's not like the final leg decides the victory. Class Rep, you should pick someone from the girls."

"Well..."

"Agreed. Don't restrict it to boys only."

"Any girls in the track and field club?"

"Ah, isn't Iga a sprinter?"

Agreement resounded all over the place.

The earlier discussion only considered boys for the final leg, so they restarted the debate again.

No one wanted to do it.

Just push it on someone else and prioritize keeping it away from me... Although it did not go that extreme, everyone was trying to minimize their chances of getting chosen.

Although Hisui felt the same, he could not help but feel a little displeased.

"Uh...... Then... Iga-san...... How do you feel about doing it?"

In a hesitating manner, Reina asked Iga Airi who was sitting in the middle of the classroom.

The usually inconspicuous short-haired girl whose appearance and grades were equally ordinary lowered her gaze and shook her head.

"Umm... I... can't run fast......"

She was not being humble. It was the truth.

Despite belonging to the track and field club and focusing on sprinting, that did not necessarily mean she could run the fastest.

Hisui had never heard praise for how fast she ran.

"...Say, if we're gonna pick from the girls, Seira-san is the best candidate, right? Aishin Middle School's Sera Reina is quite famous and has excellent achievements in running events."

These words carried nostalgia and a bit of hope.

Although the two of them were from different middle schools, they had met before.

Hisui was recalled Reina's self-introduction on the first day of class.

She seemed to have mentioned something about being good at all track and field events.

"Right, there's Class Rep too. Then let's go with Class Rep?"

"Yeah yeah... I support Class Rep. To be honest, it's quite unbelievable that you didn't join the club."

"Rather than picking a boy randomly, Class Rep probably runs faster."

"Seconded."

Agreement resounded throughout the classroom.

Not just the boys but even the girls were unanimous as well.

It looked like things were set beyond a doubt.

In actual fact, Reina's speed did rival the top male contestants.

Due to this fact, plus her lack of overt refusal, it looked like the final leg runner was decided.

But Reina remained helpless.

Ever since her middle school years were mentioned, her expression looked stiff.

Hisui noticed it.

"Not so fast."

His tone of voice was very casual without enthusiasm.

But because he seldom spoke out in class, all the classmates all turned one after another to look at Hisui in the back row.

With the entire class gazing at him, Hisui scratched his head with an annoyed expression.

Of course he found it annoying.

It was absolutely annoying to the extreme.

But he had no choice but to say it.

"All the other classes are probably going to send a boy as the final leg, right? Isn't it a bit inappropriate for us to send Class Rep there as the only girl? Even though she's fine in terms of speed."

He did not refute the class' approval of Reina's abilities but simply told them the truth.

He was not sure if this would change their minds, but at least it slowed them down to ponder.

Asking Reina to be the final leg was not a problem.

But that did not mean she must take on the role.

Although she could run very fast, but against other fast boys—what would the result be like?

Supposing Reina was the fastest runner in the class, but if there was no decisive lead before the baton passed to her, asking her to be the final leg was meaningless.

She was just one candidate at most.

Everyone returned to the discussion stage again.

This was exactly Hisui's goal.

He simply hoped to shift people's view slightly and avoid having Reina as the sole target.

"Anyway, let's write down the names of the candidates first and decide by voting or recommendation? A secret ballot is fine too. Worse comes to worst, we can simply decide it with rock-paper-scissors."

"Don't make things so complicated."

Hisui hurriedly covered Rushella's mouth and stopped her sudden speech.\

"(Stop it, what are you doing!?)"

"Fine, be quiet then."

Rushella struggled desperately while Hisui muffled her with all his strength.

Then the entire class smiled while watching their little farce.

Before their battle could be decided, the bell rang to signal the end of the period.

"Ah......"

In the end, the decision still was not made.

An uncomfortable atmosphere hung in the classroom.

Just as everyone looked at one another, Reina resolved herself and spoke:

"Well... Uh, let's tentatively have the final leg... as me, okay? As for the rest of the sequence, I'm going to pass out a form. Everyone please fill in your name and pass it along. If there's any conflicts, please discuss peacefully... Otherwise resort to rock-paper-scissors to decide. Anyway, it's all decided."

She smiled and offered an appropriate suggestion.

Although her smile was a bit stiff, at least there was a conclusion. All the classmates nodded in agreement.

"Then... I'll make the form and pass it out next time during break."

Thus homeroom ended.

During the afternoon break between periods, everyone was passing Reina's form around, writing their names down next to their desired number in the sequence.

The form was very simple. Apart from the first and final legs that were already decided, the numbers from two to thirty-nine were listed out. Once everyone wrote their name next to their desired position, the ordering was set for now.

If the position desired was already taken, negotiation was needed... But to be honest, that was kind of meaningless.

In actual fact, people simply wrote down their name where they saw a blank and were not really particular about the order.

Because the most troublesome position was already decided.

Hence, when Hisui received the form from Rushella, he simply wrote down his name in a blank spot without looking carefully.

"...Hey, there's only one spot left!? Are you bullying me!?"

"Shut up, I wanted to choose another spot too! Besides, this can't be helped, right? The people at the end are always left with no choice."

"...That's true. Since you're the one who handed it to me, that means you only had two choices available. Oh well, it actually doesn't matter."

Saying that, Hisui looked down at where he had written his name. It was the position of the second leg.

On the other hand, Rushella was thirty-ninth.

Immediately preceding the final leg.

To think the class left the first and last spots open, it felt a little malicious.

Although he could try negotiating another position, Hisui decided to leave it.

In terms of pressure, this was nothing compared to the first and final legs. "A mere sports festival, winning and losing are as irrelevant as clouds in the sky"—People were not that liberated in their ways of thinking.

Hence, Hisui was a bit worried about Reina in the last leg.

Hisui handed the completed form over to her in the neighboring seat.

"Here you go. I guess it's sort of settled now."

"...Yes. Thank you. Also during homeroom......"

Reina bowed her head and thanked him.

But Hisui did not think he had done anything worth thanking for. Neither was he that capable.

"...At the time, I'd look more cool if I said 'Let me do it.' But I don't have the courage. Besides, others probably won't approve if I'm the one doing it."

Despite making his words sound like the truth, Hisui knew clearly in his heart that he was just being a hypocrite.

Having sensed that Reina did not want to be the final leg... He should have offered himself instead.

In the end, he simply shifted people's perspective to push the burden onto others apart from Reina.

What he did was not villainous but neither can it be called justice.

Most importantly, the burden of the final leg still ended up on her shoulders.

"Is it really okay? Although you can run fast... This isn't obligatory. No matter which order you're running, you're still contributing to the overall victory, right?"

"...It's already decided. Someone has to do it after all."

Reina smiled.

But Hisui knew that her smile did not come truly from the heart.

"Then I'll hand this sequence report to the teacher... Eh, strange......"

"What's the problem?"

Seeing Reina's puzzlement, Hisui curiously looked at the form. Rushella also crowded over. But there was nothing out of the ordinary.

"No one was missed, right? Is there something strange?"

"Well... It's completely filled in. How odd, Kida-kun is absent today..."

Reina looked over to the desk that had remained empty all day since morning.

Hearing her explanation, Hisui also noticed what was strange.

A classmate was definitely absent. If everyone only wrote down their own name, there should be one blank remaining.

"Who helped Kida write his name...? Or did someone write their name twice?"

"Hmm, it's quite strange indeed. Very well, let's check it!"

Rushella gave the orders and Hisui pointed to the names on the form, checking them one by one.

Halfway through, his hand stopped.

His face twisted uncontrollably.

Then he exchanged looks with Rushella.

Naturally, Rushella was also displeased.

"What's the matter, have you discovered the problem?"

Reina looked over to where Hisui was pointing.

Seeing that name, her face instantly turned gloomy.

Fuwa Touko.

Who knew if it was by chance or deliberate—The name, written in red ballpoint pen, made Hisui and Rushella shudder in horror.

"Kyah……"

Reina also trembled and took a few steps back, accidentally bumping into a boy behind her.

"What's up, Class Rep?"

The boy asked.

"O-Over there......!"

Reina pointed to the empty seat.

All the students still lingering in the classroom noticed the commotion and looked at where she was pointing.

In the seat which was supposed to be empty...

There sat a girl.

Long black hair. An old-fashioned uniform.

Translucent body, vague outline—objects can be seen through her body on the other side.

Feeling the student's gazes, she—Fuwa Touko—smiled lightly.

"Eh, no way, you can see me!?"

"A GHOST————!!"

...After that, screams filled the classroom as the students scattered and fled.

Leaving only Hisui and Reina who had fainted in his arms.

As well as Rushella standing there in shock.

With a displeased expression, she asked the familiar earthbound spirit:

"...What are you doing here?"

"I have arrived❤"

"This girl——!!"[1]

Hisui could not help but spit out the same words someone used to comment on Rushella a long time ago.

After that, of the Seven Wonders of Seidou High, the "Touko-san" tale quickly rose to the top in prominence due to sighting incidents that were to follow.

Translator's Notes and References

1. This girl(彼女): this is a repeat of the Volume 1 Chapter 1 scene when Rushella made her entrance in the class. Kanojo(彼女) in Japanese is used as a third person reference for females (her/she/this girl) as well as meaning "girlfriend."

Chapter 1 - Tales of Touko

"...So what are you actually trying to do?"

"...Sorry."

Touko apologized, her face filled with dejection.

Kneeling formally on the floor in seiza posture, her back was very straight while she fiddled her hands uncomfortably, looking up timidly at the judge who was staring coldly down at her.

Arms crossed, standing sternly in front of her was the arbitrator, Student Council Vice President Uno Kirika.

Precisely because this "witch" had allowed Touko to remain in school, she felt responsible for this incident—no, rather, the incidents that happened recently.

"Although you're allowed freedom of movement inside the school, you should know that everything comes with limits, right!?"

"......Sorry."

Touko hung her head lower with greater dejection.

The girl's already intangible body became even more transparent.

"During summer, according to reports from students participating in supplementary lessons and club activities, eyewitness accounts have been increasing nonstop. One could ignore occasional sightings, but instead, you are proactively approaching them. According to reports from the photography club, 80% of pictures taken in school recently are ghost photographs!?"

"Because as soon as I hear the shutter, I want to be photographed... and I want to make a good pose!"

"This ghost is really quite willful."

Observing from the sidelines, Hisui could not help but offer his commentary.

After the commotion in the classroom, they had delivered Reina to the infirmary then brought Touko to the empty classroom used as the Supernatural Investigations Club's base.

Kirika quickly learned of the matter, hurried over and began to lecture.

"Students at their age are very sensitive and will see you given a slight match in wavelength! And once someone sees you and the news spreads, it makes it easier for the surrounding people to see. Could you please consider the effects, okay!?"

"......But I want to be seen."

Touko pouted unhappily.

Her cute behavior belonged to a teenaged girl.

Even though she was already dead.

"Looks like you still haven't understood your position...?"

Kirika spoke coldly then reached out above Touko's head and rubbed her fingers together.

Then white crystals fell from her fingers and scattered over Touko's head.

"Ah, stop that, Kirika-chan, could that be...!"

"Indeed. Purifying salt. There was a recent funeral held nearby, someone I knew, so I attended it. Then I obtained this. Why don't I simply help you pass on right now?"

Kirika asked with a smile, but there was no laughter in her eyes.

To think a witch would use purifying salt, how rare, but it was working against Touko.

"Ah, stop it, it burns! Oh no, I'm disappearing..."

Originally hazy to begin with, Touko's outline became even less defined.

She was almost about to vanish.

Feeling that things were serious, Hisui had no choice but to intervene.

"Say, Senpai, show her some mercy! Touko-san is reflecting already..."

"Even if I don't take matters into my own hands, the school will take action on their end. The student council has already received many complaints and there are also witnesses among the teachers. They are currently discussing seriously whether or not to have an exorcism."

"...Really? Say, Touko-san, why did all this happen?"

"Because Hisui-kun, none of you guys were at school during the summer vacation, I was so lonely... I wanted someone to play with me! I just wanted to enjoy school life properly, then while I was wandering around...!"

"Yeah, I can understand how you felt..."

"I want lots of memories... I want lots of warmth!"

Saying that, Touko was about to cry.

Although Hisui wanted to say something to comfort her, he ended up making snide remark in exasperation.

"...Uh, where would warmth come from after dying?"

A calamity arising from the slip of the tongue.

"S-So mean... It's really a concern for me!"

"Uh, even if you're concerned but... Am I wrong?"

Hisui turned to the others behind him for agreement.

However, not only Kirika, who was still scolding Touko just now, but also Rushella, Sudou Mei and Kariya Eruru, who had all been observing silently, were glaring angrily at Hisui.

"Eh... What's the situation here?"

"Hisui, there are things that can and cannot be said, right? You need to be more considerate towards maidenly hearts!"

"Yeah, Hi-kun! Don't forget that she's a maiden in the springtime of youth!"

"...I just want to say, how about you try dying yourself?"

"She didn't wish to become like this..."

Kirika was the last to criticize him.

Nevertheless, she was the one who was trying to exorcise Touko against her will.

"Hey, when did you girls become so united!? What's with this occasional cruel combo play from the girl alliance!? It's like hassling a friend to accompany her to a confession then telling the boy: 'Hey, hurry up and go out with her!' That's what it feels like!"

"Hurry up and go out with her."

"You really said it!"

Hisui shouted at Mei who went for the direct approach.

On the other hand, Touko seemed quite satisfied.

"No no no, this isn't right. Also, the reason we're gathered here is because of what happened earlier, so we need to seriously discuss Touko-san's ascension to her next life. Am I wrong?"

Hisui asked of Eruru who should still have calm mind.

However, the cool, petite beauty with half-rimmed glasses rejected his suggestion without hesitation.

"...If you are talking about satisfying the dead's lingering regrets, sure. Touko-san did not get a chance to enjoy the springtime of youth due to her sudden demise. Although I personally believe that equating romance to the days of youth to be cheap and sad, if that is her personal wish, who am I to question her? So long as you make the sacrifice, the issue can be resolved perfectly."

"Did you just say sacrifice...? You did say sacrifice!"

"I said it."

"Hey hey, could you deny it at least!? From the way you say it, I could very well end up cursed to death by her!"

"Indeed."

"Don't just assert that immediately!"

Arghhh, what a headache.

Hisui's everyday life already consisted of supplying blood to a vampire and having his virginity threatened by an artificial human. Adding ghostly possession to that would be no joking matter at all.

"Touko-san... Apart from a living human like me, umm... Aren't there other candidates among ghosts? I think there should be some inside the school......"

"Hmm, yeah there are. There's one with only half a face remaining......"

"Scary! That's even worse than an evil spirit!"

"He's apparently heading off to the next life and asked me if I wanna go together, but I rejected him. He's not my type."

"Hmm, okay... Hmm, I do believe you have the right to choose. Any other ghosts catching your eye?"

"Hmm... Ah, there's this guy with only a skeleton left who wears a black cape and carries a big scythe. He chatted with me a couple times......."

"I think that's Mr. Grim Reaper. To think he actually exists......"

Hisui could not help but recall the existence who reaped dead souls in legend.

In a certain sense, he was probably the most suitable candidate for taking Touko away.

"But his appearance is too scary so I refused. After that, we chatted a few times and I found out he's actually a nice guy."

"Hey, are you going about this like choosing a husband... You said you refused... And he even spoke!?"

"Yes. He said that this month's targets are quite high so the quota is kind of tough, and asked me to help. He even advertised 'hurry to the afterlife, don't think, just do it'..."

"He even has to fill quotas!? What a tragic job!"

"But he's actually a nice guy, saying if there's anything he could do for me, just find him anytime......"

"Wow, what a role model of the service industry......"

Hisui was getting exhausted from making all these quips.

Touko's existence was basically overturning everything he thought he knew about ghosts.

"Hisui-kun, do you dislike me?"

Touko asked cautiously and floated around Hisui.

Ghostlights seemed to be starting to appear.

If anyone outside were to chance upon this scene, the Seven Wonders would probably increase by one.

"No, not at all... Then what on earth should I do? I'm guessing that even if I took you out on a date outside school, you won't be satisfied, right?"

"...Looks like you'll need to get serious and end her youthful days of innocence all at once. Hi-kun, hurry up and make her a woman!"

Mei clenched her fists and shouted with great emotion.

Oh man, can I give up on sarcasm?

"Hey hey hey, she's already dead. Could you stop making rubbish suggestions?"

"I did consider it carefully. To simply have Hi-kun get a woman's taste to whet your lustful appetite, perhaps that would make you desire me..."

"What an absolutely awful idea! And with a ghost, how is that even possible......"

This retort caused Mei to be stunned and plunged into deep thought.

After a while, with a completely serious expression, she answered:

"...Air sex?"

"I will absolutely punch you in the gut if you weren't a girl..."

Hisui's face was distorted.

However, Mei made a "bring it on" expression and stuck her belly out at him.

"I don't mind, bring it on? Surely, your fist will break, Hi-kun. If I clench my abs seriously, even a baseball bat would easily break."

Mei daringly lifted up her clothes, showing her belly, even her bra was almost visible.

Although the lines of her abdominal muscles could not be seen, it was not difficult to imagine the hardness if she were to get serious like she said.

"...That's true too~~"

Hisui was taken about in fright after thinking about it.

He had almost forgotten.

If he got in a fight with her, not only did he have no chance of winning, he would most likely end up pinned down, dragged to a bed, and something precious of him would be taken away.

On the other hand, standing behind Hisui, Rushella asked Eruru about unfamiliar words as usual.

"Hey, I'm asking you, what does air se..."

"Do not blame me for shooting if you dare finish that word, capish?"

Eruru threatened, having pulled out the sacred gun Argentum from somewhere, with her finger already on the trigger.

Naturally, this move did not suffice as an answer.

Speaking of which, was there anyone who could give a definite answer for this term?

"What does it even matter!? I just wanna know! Hurry and tell me! I already know the meaning of 'air' in front. I've heard Hisui talk about something called 'air guitars' before. So all you need is explain the remaining part in detail...!"

"That is even more unacceptable!"

"Oooooh... What does it even matter!? If it's something fun, I wanna do it too!"

"S-Shut up! Have you no shame...!?"

"It's related to shame? Then hurry and tell me!"

"U-Umm...!"

Eruru's face was so red that she was about to short circuit.

However, Touko began to ponder with a serious expression.

"Oh right, there's that too... Then I'll be able to become an adult...!"

"No way no way. How do you intend to do it!?"

"Hmm... Oh yeah, recently, I've achieved 'automatic writing' and also entering people's dreams. If I make flexible use of these abilities......"

"So automatic writing was how you filled your name in the relay race sequence form. That's too paranormal! If you go inside people's dreams, surely they'll end up with sleep paralysis and spellbound beds!"

"Hmm, looks like everyone will have nightmares."

"That's basically haunting by an evil spirit! An exorcism really will be needed!"

"But, b-b-but, if it's inside dreams, I can also...!"

"Wait up, Touko-san, in that case, when Hi-kun wakes up, there will be a situation in his underpants."

Mei began to worry seriously.

Yes, what annoying consideration.

"Can you show a little restraint...?"

"Don't worry, I've already mentioned before, I'll personally wash Hi-kun's sticky underwear until they're clean..."

"...Whatever."

Hisui sighed in exasperation. At the same time, Kirika shrugged.

"It probably cannot be helped. However, ghosts definitely cannot linger forever in the mortal plane. If that were the case, this world would have been filled up by the dead a long time ago. Dead people will vanish eventually from this world. That is part of the laws of this world."

Kirika spoke as though teaching a lesson, causing the mood to cool down.

Indeed, these days could not persist indefinitely.

There must be an end.

"If there is a low risk of harm, I could turn a blind eye to the issue... But there always exist people with keen spiritual senses. Could you show a little more self-discipline?"

Finally free of Rushella's questioning, Eruru stated calmly.

Lectured by the two representatives of reason, the inexperienced ghost apologized timidly.

"Sorry... I'll pay attention."

"Very well, then I shall be going. The sports festival's preparations are quite hectic."

Then Kirika left.

Recently, she had been basically showing up then leaving like this.

Kirika was fundamentally different from a "go home" club member like Hisui. Clearly, the student council's work was very busy.

"Sports festival huh."

Staying in the classroom, Hisui muttered blankly.

He could not forget the gloom on Reina's face earlier.

He had considered simply leaving the final leg to Rushella, but he still could not decide if that was the right thing to do.

"Would it be better to let Touko-san participate in the relay race? It seems like she's so light it'd be an easy job for her..."

Just as he muttered to himself, Mei interrupted.

"Hey, that scene is simply terrifying if you imagine it. Besides, whether she can carry the baton is a problem. It's not like there's not enough people, why consider her?"

"Oh, that really is what it'd feel like, right? Say, why don't you do the final leg? Your leg strength is pretty good, right?"

"I don't want to draw too much attention. If I went all-out, that kind of brittle ground will break underfoot, hindering my speed instead."

"How high is your leg strength actually..."

In movies, the powerful monsters of Frankenstein were always portrayed as slow and heavy. As the latest model, Mei had already improved on the former design.

Nevertheless, power and speed still seemed to be mutually exclusive.

"Well, since Hi-kun is asking, I could try it out? In preparation for the sports festival, I've prepared bloomers. Navy blue, rouge, green, rich variations, everything you could want?"

"...No, I'm not interested."

"Don't pretend."

"I'm not pretending. Ever since I was young, that sort of interest went extinct a long time ago. By the way, Touko-san... Why are you wearing it!?"

Before he noticed, Touko had already changed into gym clothes.

With navy blue bloomers.

After all, as a ghost, she was apparently able to change her attire through her thoughts. How astounding.

"Eh, because it's what Hisui-kun wants..."

Touko shyly looked up and said.

She even had a bandanna tied around her head, looking like she was the one and only final leg candidate.

"W-Wait up, Touko! The final leg should be me! Victory is mine...! Okay, I wanna wear gym clothes and a bandanna as well...!"

In the end, even Rushella wanted to join in.

On the other hand, naturally, Eruru was looking at Hisui coldly.

"N-No, you don't have to do that! Besides, I find ordinary shorts and half-length pants more healthy and cute."

"Oh, so that's your fetish faction?"

Staying calm and rational, Mei confirmed.

Her serious eyes looked like they belonged to a professional market analyst.

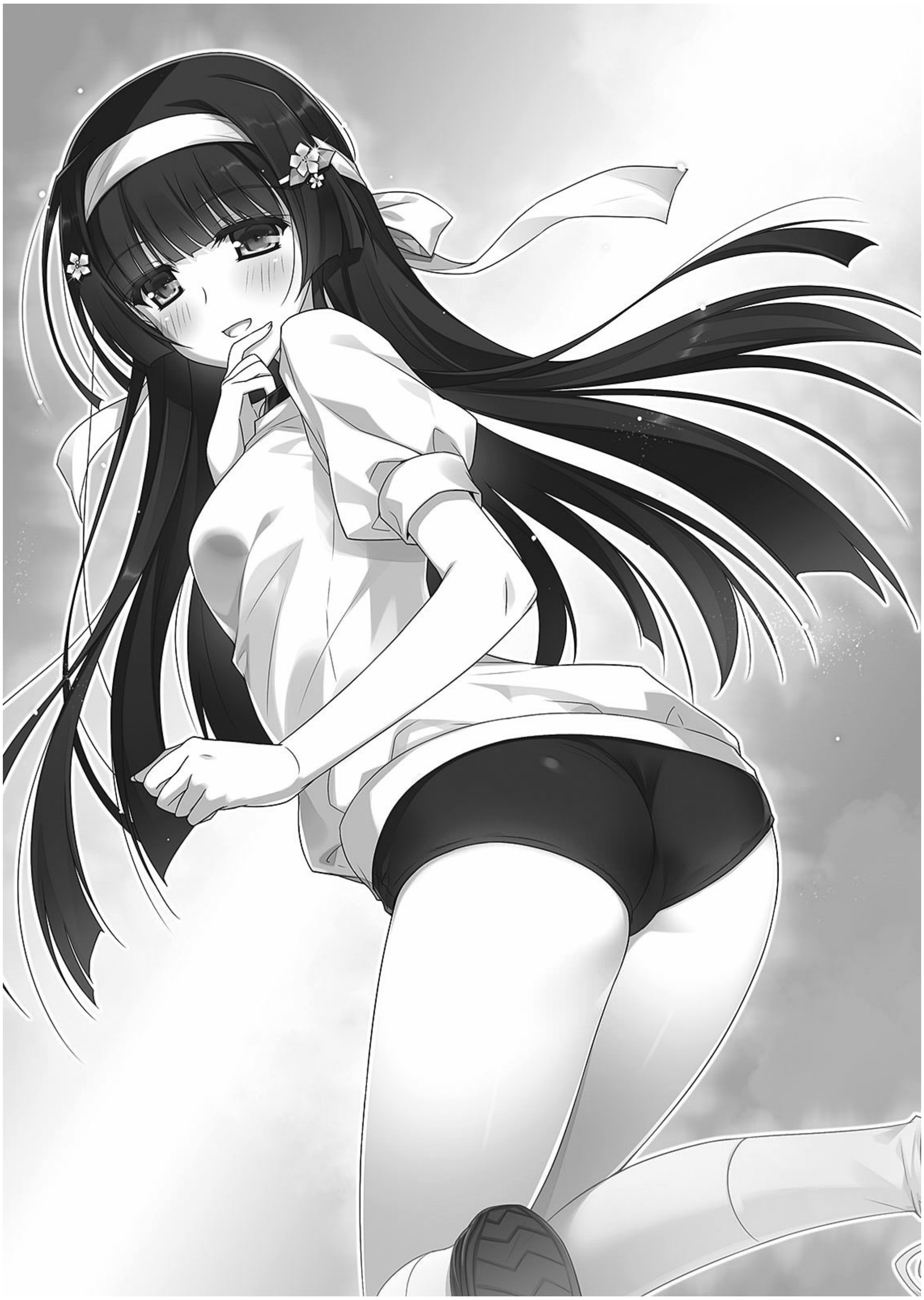
"Hey, are there factions in such things!? Are there faction wars going on in secret!?"

"How naive, Hi-kun... Bloomer worshipers, shorts worshipers, spandex worshipers, tracksuit worshipers... Ever since the age of bloomers' supremacy was overthrown, girls' sportswear has entered warring states era of a free-for-all battlefield!"

"I've never heard of it. Even if it's as you say, what does it have to do with me in the slightest?"

"Of course it matters greatly. Suppose I trick you into the gym storeroom and lock the door, if you don't like my outfit, what would I do?"

"Let me state for the record, I'm absolutely not going there!"



"Don't worry, I'll drag you there by force❤"

Saying that, Mei raised her arm to display her combat strength.

The extremely feminine upper arm, with its snow-white complexion, would easily take off, let alone snap, Hisui's arm if she used her full strength.

"Scary! Besides, going to that kind of musty and moodless place... to do that, are you satisfied with that?"

"Rather, it should be said that that kind of environment helps build up the mood? As long as Hi-kun wishes, I'd gladly do it, even in a stable!"

"As if I'd wish that!"

Firm denial must be expressed here.

Excessively scandalous.

"Hisui, what are you two going to do in a stable!? Also, what should I wear for the sports festival!? So, treat it as a reward for your everyday efforts, umm, I-I could wear what you prefer..."

"...Thanks, but the thought is enough. Also, please ignore Sudou's comments, she's a bad influence."

Seeing Rushella ask shyly, Hisui could not help but sigh and reply to her discreetly.

By the time he noticed, it was sundown already. Hisui led Rushella and prepared to leave.

"It's about time to go home. The fridge is empty so I'll need to go shopping."

"Oh really? So, Touko-san, in order to conquer Hi-kun, let's have a strategy conference."

"No problem, you can count on me!"

"...Yeah yeah, go ahead you two, do your worst."

Ignoring the artificial human and the ghost, Hisui left school.

All he thought about was visiting the supermarket and buying dinner's ingredients together with Rushella.

Originally, he wanted to make a combo of grilled fish and boiled vegetables, but there happened to be a discount on imported beef. Unable to resist Rushella's persistent pleading, Hisui ended up changing the dinner menu to steak.

"Hmm, tonight's dishes are very extravagant! If only we could eat meat every day."

"Don't be a picky eater... Well. You're a vampire so it doesn't matter."

Along the way home, Hisui muttered.

For a vampire, everything apart from blood would be considered junk food.

Despite not needing to eat at all in fact, most vampires were quite particular and extravagant in their tastes for food.

Hisui's foster parent was the same in the past.

She loved meat and only liked it medium rare.

But in consideration for Hisui, the dining table would offer other food as well... All cooked to perfection with strict standards for taste.

"Hmm? What's the matter?"

"...Nothing."

Rushella's voice expelled these thoughts from Hisui's mind, bringing him back to reality.

If she realized what he was thinking about, surely she would be displeased again.

"Also, why are you so concerned with discounts and compare them repeatedly? You also check out all the flyers. Are you a housewife!?"

"How sad, I can't find any words to deny... But isn't being economical a virtue?"

"Since it's food for me, what does a little extravagance matter? Otherwise, you should use my gold coins. There's quite a lot left, right?"

Just as Rushella pointed out, they were not actually so poor as to want for living expenses.

A small part of the gold coins from her coffin had been exchanged for cash, but the majority was still at home.

Finances were given to Hisui for full control, but he never used that money at all.

"Hmm, if living expenses to spend on you are depleted, I'll start using them, but there's no problem right now."

"...It's fine if you spend it too? Since it's my money, then spending it on me is only natural, right?"

"True, but it's still better to save money. Even if a vampire lives forever young, life would be hard without money. Especially the way you live, big spender."

"You're noisy. Shut up!"

Rushella pouted unhappily. Hisui ignored her.

He was not wrong. Besides, his foster parent who was of her kind, also shared the same values.

"Umm... Say."

"Hmm?"

"That parent who raised you, she must be quite loaded, right? After all, you're not worrying about living expenses right now."

Very rarely did Rushella bring up Hisui's parent—Miraluka.

Regarding money, it looked like Rushella had many opinions.

"Well... She apparently went to earn money quite often. Having lived for that long, naturally, she had quite substantial savings. If she wished, she could have spent her money recklessly on anything apart from blood and there was no need to be so economical."

"Umm... After she died, she left you a lot of things, right?"

Rushella asked awkwardly.

Becuase she knew that the deceased parent was part of the past that Hisui did not wish to bring up the most.

But for the sake of understanding Hisui more... She still asked.

"She did leave me a lot. Rather, she left too much. All rights to the house, bank account savings, etc... To be honest, I'm currently not too clear on what else. I think there's also a lawyer prepared. When I'm twenty, everything will be handed over to me. Right now, living expenses are fine, so there's nothing to worry about."

"What's that? There's a will? She knew... she was going to die?"

"No, I think... She probably thought that a day would come when she could leave me without worrying... Something like that. After all, there would come a day when I'd surpass her outward age. If we still stayed together, it'd be too unnatural."

"..."

Indeed.

An aging and decrepit human. An immortal vampire with eternal youth. They could not possibly live together forever.

Humans die eventually.

Even before death arrived, a weak and elderly human would not match an eternally youthful vampire either.

Perhaps people in the surroundings would noticed the weirdness and cause problems.

A relationship doomed to end, never reaching eternity.

Miraluka very likely knew this very well.

Since antiquity, she had seen too many encounters and partings.

Perhaps because of that, she choose to leave behind a massive inheritance in preparation for the future day of parting.

"...Then what are you worrying about, just go ahead and use it? She left it precisely for you."

Rushella spoke unhappily.

Imperceptibly, she had wrapped her arms around Hisui's arm.

"Hmm... I'm also hesitating about whether I should use it."

"...?"

"As much as I don't like to admit, it's true that she raised me. Actually, that's quite enough already, so I don't want to continue relying on her. Well, tuition can't be helped and I can't really bring myself to work part-time like mad to earn money... Anyway, I don't want to keep relying on her."

An indescribable sense of loneliness floated in Hisui's eyes.

By this point, Miraluka still occupied a part of his heart and would continued to do so in the future.

Whether accepting her legacy wish or opposing it, neither result could escape from her grasp.

Rushella probably felt this level of meaning and terrifying expression surfaced on her face as she clung onto Hisui's arm tightly.

"Ouch, what are you doing, it really hurts!"

"So noisy, shut up!! Hurry and go home!"

"What the heck... H-Hey, you're pressing your bosom..."

"So noisy!! Stop saying rubbish! I want to take a bath first, so prepare dinner for me during that time!"

Rushella hugged even tighter, almost entangling her entire body around him.

It was difficult to walk.

Clearly his house was before his eyes, yet every step seemed so difficult.

"Stop it, could you stop stuffing that massive bust, so large and soft and puffy it defies science, into my armpit!? When I walk, it touches... Eh, did I touch something sharp?"

"What are you talking about!? Hurry and walk!"

Rushella ignored Hisui's struggling and dragged him forward.

From an observer view, they were clearly a couple with the boy being dragged by the girl.

For example, this observer standing at the entrance to his house, who knew what expression would be made?

"The two of you look like you're having loads of fun, eh?"

Leaning against the wall, a woman jeered.

Her black, short-cropped hair and slender physique stood out under the streetlight's illumination.

The black, woman's suit gave the impression of a career woman while the curves of her body resembled that of a gorgeous model—or a seasoned athlete.

"It's been a while, the two of you, eh?"

Oogami Rangetsu—that was her name.

Belonging to the Metropolitan Police Department's Supernatural Investigations Section like Eruru, she was a proper detective.

Nevertheless, Hisui and Rushella ignored her completely and went past her directly.

"...Hey, hold it right there, you two! Why are you ignoring me!?"

Seeing them ignore her, Rangetsu yelled angrily.

But they looked at each other and suspiciously eyed the uninvited guest.

"Hey, she looks angry... Is she here to visit you? She doesn't look like a vampire, could she be an enemy? Maybe she's related to your lost memories?"

"I don't know her! Fine, just ignore her!"

Rushella dragged Hisui towards the entrance to their home.

Rangetsu grabbed him.

"Hey hey hey, hold it right there! It's me! Oogami Rangetsu!"

Then she pointed at herself and announced her name.

Hisui made a look as though he remembered and clapped his hands.

"Oh... Right!"

"You remember now!?"

"Nope."

He answered expressionlessly and took out his key.

"...Hey, wait up! What the heck, you should have remembered with this sort of dialogue, okay!?"

"Sorry, who are you again?"

"That's right! No recollection at all! If you keep pestering us, we're gonna call the p'lice, okay!?"

Rushella was just as enraged as Hisui.

Both of them had forgotten Rangetsu completely.

"You two...! I am the police! Look, here's my badge!"

Just like in a television crime drama, Rangetsu opened up her badge to show her identity.

But the two cast skeptical glances at her.

"That's fake, right?"

"Hmm, I knew it, in these situations, we should call the p'lice..."

"You two are going too far! Have you forgotten the vampire incident last time!? It's me, the werewolf, Oogami Rangetsu!!"

She was supposed to hide this identity as much as possible, yet she yelled with reckless abandon.

By this point, Hisui seemed to remember.

"Oh, from that time!"

"Yes yes!"

"Sorry for troubling you last time. Goodbye."

"Farewell!"

Then Hisui and Rushella ignored her decisively and opened the door to enter the house.

But Rangetsu mercilessly grabbed Hisui's back collar and dragged him back.

"What are you doing...? Didn't I remember already?"

"What's the point if you do nothing more than remembering? What kind of reaction is this!? Even if an ordinary police came to your house, you should be a bit more surprised, right!?"

"I haven't committed any crimes. Don't be so full of yourself, dog of the state."

"Yes, that suits your name very well!"[1]

Rushella crossed her arms and concurred.

Struck in a werewolf's greatest berserk button, Rangetsu glared viciously in return at them.

"You two really dare say anything you want... I am a noble wolf!"

"But based on biological classification, the boundary between dogs and wolves is very fuzzy, right? And it's not like one is inferior or superior to the other."

"Yeah, dogs are so cute, being so furry and fuzzy. Besides, for a werewolf-human hybrid like you, what right do you have to talk about pureblooded wolves?"

Rushella boldly pointed out the truth.

Unable to refute her words, Rangetsu gnashed her teeth.

"Then what business do you have? I still have to make dinner, you know?"

"Finally, you're willing to talk properly. But standing out here isn't really appropriate..."

"No, let's just stand here. Hurry up and finish it."

In a laid back manner, Hisui began to ask Rangetsu to leave.

At this moment, Rushella quietly whispered in his ear.

"Hey, maybe this bitch wants to enter the house?"

"Eh, why?"

"Because she looks like she's been waiting at the entrance a long time. And deliberately looking like she's waiting."

"Oh, you mean leaning against the wall, with her arms and legs crossed? If it were indoors, whatever, but a full-fledged adult shouldn't be doing that in the middle of the road, right? That kind of behavior is, at most, second year of middle school."

"Yeah, her long and slender limbs are quite a sight, but I can't bear the sight of them in person!"

"Yeah. And this wall is so rough, who knows if one might soil or rip clothes."

"Oh, no way!?"

Rangetsu frantically twisted her head to look at her back.

Naturally, a neck's range of motion was limited. After futile efforts to look behind, all she succeeded was hurting her neck.

Hence, Rushella very helpfully checked out the fabric on her back for her.

"Looks like there's no damage but there's a lot of white dust. Here, let me get it off for you."

Rushella brushed the dust away, saving Rangetsu from her embarrassing situation.

"Yes, it's clean now!"

"...Thank you."

"Okay, take care on your way back."

"Good luck with your work."

Hisui and Rushella smiled and sent her off.

Rangetsu bowed and turned to leave—Then suddenly braked hard and turned around.

"...Hey, why did you send me off so naturally!? I almost fell for it!"

"Oopsie. She saw through it."

Hisui stuck his tongue out mischievously while Rushella made an "oh no" expression.

"It's time for you two to behave yourselves... Stop playing adults for a fool!"

"...Then be quick with what you've gotta say. If you want us to invite you inside for tea, forget about it!"

"Like I'd care for that! There's a cafe nearby, how about my treat!? Don't underestimate civil servants, okay!?"

"Why do you want to talk with us so much? You and me... There should be nothing to say, right? So you're looking for Hisui. Are you trying to 'persuade' him again!? No, he belongs to me!"

Rushella hugged Hisui's right arm, no, his entire body and entered a high state of alert.

It was impossible for her to get along with a werewolf in the first place. And now, she was treating Rangetsu the same as Mei—a rival targeting Hisui.

"Why are you two sticking together so close... Hmph, so you've got a thing for vampires, huh?"

"...No."

Hisui denied verbally, but because Rushella's bosom was pressing tightly against him, he could not help but blush.

And did not resist either.

"I came here today because of the vampire incident last time. The results of the interrogation are almost ready. So I came to give you a report."

"Who cares about that. I'm not interested."

Hisui rejected flatly.

He was not pretending and really did exude an aura of indifference.

"Uh, but... You should understand the situation, right?"

"More precisely, I don't trust you. Perhaps you questioned that vampire called Fabru or Fester or whatever and got a lot of true facts out of him. But second hand from you, it could very well have changed already. I don't need your report, filled with bias and ulterior motives, so I'll just ask Kariya later."

Hisui rejected mercilessly.

In the earlier incident, they had been enemies for some duration. Even now, Hisui still had lingering fears.

The boy who treated all races equally yet was wary against supernatural creatures that resembled humans.

The most terrifying monster in the world—Humans.

He found it impossible to trust Rangetsu who was trying to turn from foe to friend, in accordance with her approach to survival.

Melding into human society, interacting with humans, disguised as a human, doing all this required eloquence of speech and craftiness.

"W-What... You trust Kariya-san that much!?"

"She's more trustworthy than you."

"...That's it? I thought it's because you like her? You like the petite type!?"

"...What are you talking about? Well, I do admit she's quite cute."

Hisui gave his honest opinion but ended up causing Rushella to grip him forcefully.

"...What the heck?"

"You're being noisy. Shut up."

Rushella pouted with displeasure and rubbed her face against Hisui's arm. She looked like a child who was hugging a favorite doll.

"Kariya-san... Is she really that worthy of your trust? Although the earlier incident changed her stance somewhat, in actual fact, she's just using you, right?"

"Whatever. I've received quite a lot of help from her, so I think we're even. If the things I do can bring benefits to her, I guess it's a good thing to be happy about?"

"...!"

The unexpected answer made Rangetsu agitated.

Why was there such a large difference between the ways he treated Eruru and her?

"She's only curious about your strange constitution... And concerned about this vampire, right? One day, she'll point the barrel of her gun at you, do you understand?"

"No, she does that on a frequent basis already. To be honest, I'd be totally grateful if that could be changed. Is this all you wanna talk about? Did you come all this way just to talk trash behind Kariya's back?"

Hisui was implying "finish what you're saying and be gone." His tone of voice did not try to conceal his displeasure at all.

Exuding an indifferent aura of evicting guests, Hisui was making Rangetsu a little intimidated.

"Th-That's not it! I-It's about... Last time... What you casually took away! Do you really think that kind of high-class holy water comes for free!?"

"What does it matter if it was used to defeat a 'Pure of the Pure'? It's gotta be used some time. I thought I asked Kariya to get some lenience for me already?"

"Uh, umm, I mean..."

"If you still insist that I recompense, then I'll go ask someone from the Vatican to give you a replacement."

Rushella asked Hisui quietly after hearing him.

"How do you have connections with the Vatican?"

"It's Miraluka who had some. Of course, her relationship with the Vatican was essentially one between enemies, seeing as simply stepping on that piece of land caused her great suffering, but there are apparently a couple acquaintances there. Due to getting involved with the Church's core members, she had a few interactions with them, similar to a real version of the Da Vinci Code. If I mention her name, getting holy water shouldn't be a problem. Or perhaps I might even have some existing in my basement already."

Without letting Rangetsu overhear, Hisui secretly whispered into Rushella's lovely ear.

From a third party's view, their exchange looked like loving whispers between lovers.

"What are you two flirting about...!?"

"This isn't flirting."

"There's no flirting at all."

Even though they were intimately entangled together, arm in arm.

Not a single gap could be seen between them.

"So it turns out like this huh... So in the end, this is the fact of the matter!?"

"...Have you made a serious misunderstanding?"

"Shut up! Enough, apart from what you used in the last incident, a few other confiscated items have gone missing. I was orignally just trying to confirm in detail... There's no need now!!"

"Eh, are you serious? Oh... If you need any help, I'll try searching within my ability. Is it fine if I get instructions from Kariya?"

Hisui ended up adding fuel to the fire.

This young man would occasionally put certain taboos to words.

"So annoying! You vampire fetishist!"

"No no, Kariya is a dhampir, she'll get mad if you mix them up..."

"Shut up and go enjoy your blood-sucking play!"

"Could you not use the word 'play', okay?"

"Better watch yourself on a moonlit night! Especially the full moon!"

"Isn't the usual warning about a dark night? Oh right, you're a werewolf..."

Before Hisui's jab could finish, Rangetsu had already run off, almost bursting into tears.

As expected of a werewolf, her astounding speed caused her to meld into the darkness and disappear before their eyes.

"What on earth did she come here for?"

"I think she seems quite into you, right?"

Rushella's words carried barbs.

Although she was not particularly shrewd of mind, she already possessed a maiden's heart like a human.

"Huh? Me? My only good point is that I'm used to getting along with non-humans, nothing more, right?"

"I think that's exactly the point."

Indeed.

This was precisely Kujou Hisui's greatest advantage.

Due to his foster parent and his constitution, he did not hold biased preconceptions against supernatural entities.

Precisely because of that, he was surrounded by so many ladies fighting for his attentions.

"...Let's forget about that woman for now. Hurry up and make dinner! Grill the meat! For the sake of the relay race, I need proper nourishment!"

Rushella's thoughts turned to food. Dragging Hisui's arm, she urged him to hurry to the kitchen and get to work.

Their stomachs were already rumbling with hunger.

"Yeah yeah, I know I know. You want it medium rare, right?"

"Yes! By the way, I want red wine!"

"As if you're gonna get wine! ...That said, I guess I could add a bit to the side dishes or snacks. After all, there's more than I could ever use up in the underground wine cellar."

"...You will?"

Rushella did not expect his answer and asked with worry.

Indeed, kept in the basement of this house were uncountable numbers of excellent vintages from the past.

Vampires loved red wine. Naturally, the one who collected them was Hisui's parent.

Last time, Rushella had broken the bottle that carried the most precious memories from this collection.

Hisui did not seem to mind and never brought it up again. However, Rushella still felt guilty about that incident.

"This is similar to last time's holy water, I shouldn't let it go to waste. I can add wine to the beef and vegetables during cooking so there's no lack of opportunities to use it. Even if it's discount meat, adding this wine will improve its quality substantially."

"That's... right! What's yours is mine! Serve me well!"

"What a glutton you are. But could you not steal wine to drink? I can already foresee you getting drunk."

"I... will not. Umm... Only openly, two of us together."

"I'm not of age yet."

"Then... Umm, we'll wait until you're old enough!"

"Oh... Okay, that works."

"Yes!"

Hisui did not waste time pondering and readily agreed.

Rushella also seemed satisfied with the current state.

Thinking that this sort of everyday life could persist forever...

Forgetting that between vampires and humans—The difference in race.

"...By the way, your colleague came calling at my door yesterday. Did you hear anything about it?"

"No, this is my first time hearing of it."

During the lunch break, Hisui asked Eruru about last night but she flatly denied.

She did not even look at Hisui when answering him.

While eating a sandwich with one hand, she was staring at the notebook computer on the desk.

"And even though we are co-workers, we belong to completely different chains of command and standpoints. Do you not think you are asking the wrong person?"

"Yeah, but you're both under the MPD, right? Honestly, her hassling is quite annoying. I'm afraid to leave the house when there's a full moon at night."

"Perhaps all she wants is simply to see you?"

"Huh?"

"Even if she is unwilling to pass messages through me, she could call by phone or send a subordinate. There are all sorts of ways. Given she is contacting you in person like this and trying to recruit you, does it not make sense?"

"Why would she do that? Even if I'm more knowledgeable than average, I'm still a high schooler after all, right?"

"On top of experience, there is the matter between genders."

Eruru typed dextrously using one hand on the keyboard while making the kind of statement that did not suit her.

"In the earlier incident, she found out about the foster parent who raised you as well as your constitution. However, you can still keep the status quo. Most likely, she did not report to her superiors and discreetly hid things in her heart on her own initiative. You should express a little gratitude at least, right?"

"... Well, okay. Say, you immerse yourself in work all day long, is it that fun?"

Seeing Eruru still attached to work even during the lunch break, Hisui asked incredulously.

Eruru had infiltrated the school to monitor Rushella and essentially did not interact with her classmates most of the time.

Apart from Hisui, she did not even chat with anyone. Neither did she leave her computer during breaks. She always ate lunch alone in solitude.

"Say... Could you play the part of a student a little, how's that?"

"Are you asking a university graduate to play as a student?"

"Uh, what I mean is... Enjoy the springtime of youth?"

"Enough with the stale jokes. Has your mind regressed to Rushella's level?"

"Wow, that sounds really obnoxious."

Hisui sighed and looked back to his seat.

Next to there, Rushella and Mei had their lunchboxes laid out while they chatted casually, occasionally entering the usual arguments.

Comparing Eruru with Rushella—Indeed, the one over there was definitely enjoying her youth much more.

"Since you're at school, how about relaxing properly? At least do something more enjoyable and relaxing than work?"

"My presence here itself is already work. Please do not worry unnecessarily over me."

Eruru's stance remained firm.

Hisui also stopped with his irresponsible remarks and turned his direction towards lessening her work load.

"I heard from that woman yesterday that the Supernatural Investigations Section lost some of the confiscated items. Was it during the earlier commotion? Let me help you find them?"

"That comes under my responsibilities so there is no need for you to assist. Indeed, a few articles were lost and there was some damage, but the aftermath is almost complete. However, I did hear that one object still cannot be found despite all efforts."

"What is it?"

"No idea."

Eruru shrugged to express her ignorance.

Her irresponsible attitude caused Hisui to probe the issue deeper.

"Hey hey hey, what are you guys doing with taxpayer's hard earned cash?"

"I really have no idea. It is a chemical that was confiscated from a radical guild under a certain black magic system, apparently a liquid kept in a suspicious-looking bottle... Of unknown purpose. It could be a poison or a drug, or even something completely harmless."

"What, that sounds totally scary!? What would happen if it got outside!?"

"Very likely, it's already outside. Originally, the staff intended to request someone outside to conduct a thorough analysis, but then the vampire commotion happened. The staff transporting the bottle was one of the victims."

Eruru spoke with a serious expression.

On that day, pointing her gun at colleagues and bringing salvation to humans, those dark and depressing memories could not be expelled from her heart.

"So... The bottle was not found among the remains?"

"Indeed. After all, the bottle is small and could have dropped somewhere or was picked up by someone... Most likely the former. Since the contents were not identified, plus the complicated incident, the police did not publicize this affair. They simply had someone file a report and ended the matter."

"I see... Oh, right, about that Fer-whatever vampire..."

"You mean Fergus. What about him?"

"What happened to the coffin?"

Making sure that Rushella's attention was not directed towards this side, Hisui leaned in close and whispered to Eruru.

The coffin dredged up from the bottom of the sea, made with the same craftsmanship as Rushella's coffin—Its connection to Rushella's origins was still a mystery.

"Fergus' torture... I mean interrogation was completely entrusted to me. I have already asked him and he himself apparently does not know."

"Oh sorry, did you say torture? You really said torture!?"

"I said it."

"Deny it, okay!? If you corrected yourself, then don't admit it!"

"Do not worry. I have things under control. False testimony will not be forced out of him. Although he was very cocky in the beginning, after a few garlic injections, he started to froth at the mouth and his eyes went dead, then he told us everything."

"Scary! As expected of the great hero Kariya. Although I'm equally well-versed in vampire weaknesses, you effortlessly did what I could never do. I am totally impressed in reverence and trepidation, greatly intimidated~~"

"This is all thanks to you, making him combine with holy water on a particle level. He is already thrashing about so much he cannot speak clearly. Oh well, give it some time and patience to listen to him give out the full story. After that, I allowed him to rest for a few days. It should be almost about time now."

Eruru even smiled as she spoke.

This made Hisui's hair stand on end and he could not help but distance himself from her.

"What is the matter with you?"

"...Nothing."

"About the coffin, you could try asking Kirika-san's opinion, right? I happen to have this from Fergus and the sample you provided to me in the past."

Eruru took out evidence bags from her school bag.

Inside the bags were fragments shaved off from the two coffins respectively.

"Oh right. Then let me help you take them over. I'll be gone for a bit, so please help me watch Rushella."

"If anything happens, I will shoot. Do not worry."

"...Scary."

In emergencies, Eruru never hesitated. That was her style.

Carrying some level of unease, Hisui left the classroom.

Although he knew the location of Kirika's classroom, to be honest, he felt hesitant going to an upperclassmen's floor, let alone visiting a second year's class.

He originally wanted to ask her to come out using a text message, but after recalling her responsibilities in the school, another location opened up as a possibility.

"...Lemme try the student council office."

He had heard that she often worked at the office during the lunch break as well.

Seeing as the sports festival was looming near, she was probably more likely to be in the office rather than her classroom.

Arriving at the staff room's floor, Hisui looked up at the signs over each door.

He knew that the student council office should be nearby but he had never visited before.

"Hmm... Ah, it's here."

Finally, he found the sign which said "Student Council Office." Before him was Kirika's workplace.

This room was only half the size of a normal classroom. Its structure was similar to special classrooms like laboratories or preparation rooms.

Hisui was just about to open the door when a boy walked out from inside.

The guy was quite handsome. Unlike Hisui's androgynous features, he was a standard male. Darker complexion. Muscular physique.

A face that girls found attractive, Hisui recognized it.

Hisui recalled the student council president and third year student—He frequently gave speeches in morning assemblies. Reportedly, like Kirika, he was equally gifted in beauty and intellect, a student deeply trusted by the teachers.

"Excuse me..."

Hisui tried to talk to him but did not expect him to leave directly, ignoring him.

"Wait up! We haven't finished talking!"

Another girl chased out from the student council office.

It was Kirika.

"What is the meaning of this!? If the matters of the sports festival are not discussed seriously, you will cause others trouble in the future!?"

"I've already said, just do it your way, okay? After all, it doesn't matter whether I'm present or not. All the other council members think so too."

"But... Why can't you do your work properly!?"

Ignoring Hisui's arrival, Kirika scolded the president repeatedly.

"Because you go too far. Isn't it time for you to realize? That's why nobody wants to come here."

The president retorted impatiently. Kirika fell silent.

It looked like he had struck her in a sore spot.

"Like before, just do as you like. No one will object. If you want my approval to report back to the teachers, I give you my approval. Are you happy now?"

"..."

"I still have a club meeting, so I'll be on my way."

The student council president left Kirika, whose head was bowed down, and departed through the corrider.

Hisui and Kirika remained silent. Finally, Kirika was the first to speak.

"...Looks like you witnessed an embarrassing sight."

"No, it's okay..."

Although Hisui tried to comfort her, he sighed in his mind, lamenting he should not have seen this scene.

Although he had already heard rumors that Kirika did not get along with the other members of the student council, after seeing it with his own eyes, he could not say anything.

"Is it... Differences in direction...? Or different opinions on operation...?"

"...Pretty much. More bluntly stated, all the other members seem to hate me."

Kirika spoke with self-abandonment.

Never compromising, devoting herself to work altruistically was Kirika, compared to the other member's whose motivation was lukewarm... There was a decisive and unfillable gap in passion towards the student council.

"How about talking to the teacher who's the student council advisor...? Even if there are disputes, there can't be no solution."

Hisui made a practical suggestion but surely Kirika must have thought of it already.

She ended up scoffing derisively.

"I've brought it up many times. Every time, I was asked to compromise.

Saying I am too headstrong and should accommodate others more. Is that what you want to say as well?"

Kirika turned her gaze towards him with some hostility.

But Hisui simply scratched his head unfazed.

"No~ I don't really care. After all, I only only know you, Senpai, so I'll only stand on your side."

"W-What are you talking about...!?"

Kirika was greatly shaken.

However, Hisui did not notice her blushing.

"Uh, exactly what the words say? Although they have their own ideas which might actually be correct, even so, I have never thought of siding with them. Rather, I don't want to do that. Besides, you're already so troubled. Senpai."

"I-It's not like... I'm troubled..."

Kirika fidgeted with her fingers, her face growing redder and redder.

Nevertheless, Hisui did not notice and kept going.

"It's not easy for one person to bear everything. Although being accommodating is important too, ultimately it still depends on how you want to do things, Senpai. If you find it tough then compromise. If you find compromising even tougher, then just keep things as they are. At any rate, I'm not gonna dislike you for it, Senpai."

"W-What do you mean by that...!?"

"...? Uh, basically what I said..."

Kirika suddenly leaned over, causing Hisui to retreat.

Although she did not get as close as Rushella would, it was still close enough to make him uncomfortable.

"Anyway, I've received a lot of your help already, so if you think I can be of use, I don't mind doing odd chores... The others can also..."

"I don't need anyone apart from you..."

This last sentence made Hisui completely puzzled.

"But, even if Rushella will definitely cause more trouble than helping, Sudou could mess things up if she used the wrong strength, I don't wanna trouble Kariya during the daytime, putting Touko-san aside... Eh, why am I the only one left?"

"...See. So it's best if you help me by yourself. I intend to enter the student council president election next year. If I'm elected, I will let you join the student council."

"Oh no, that's okay. It's troublesome."

"Quiet! I have already decided. Yes, this will do..."

Summing up on her own, Kirika nodded with satisfaction.

Seeing Hisui surprised, Kirika then asked him why he had come.

"...So, what do you need? You went out of your way to see me."

"Oh~~ Last time, that vampire's coffin is quite similar to Rushella's. I was wondering if I could ask for your opinion or get some help in investigating... But seeing you so busy, forget about it."

"Not at all, you are welcome."

Saying that, Kirika snatched the plastic bags from Hisui's hand.

"Oh, but..."

"I already said it is fine. But don't get your hopes up too much. How about... This coming Saturday... Would you like to come to my house?"

Kirika looked up and asked.

Her attitude suddenly changed 180 degrees.

"...Do you have something planned already?"

"Nothing, I guess..."

"Then come. Also, my grandmother finally returned. Regarding these fragments and Rushella's matter... She should be able to answer many of your doubts. You're interested... too, right?"

"Well... I guess..."

Going over to a girl's home on a holiday—Although Hisui felt a little resistant, but given he had legitimate business to handle, there was no time to hesitate.

"Then... It's decided. Very well, I will also prepare some light-blocking agent. Just pick it up when you're visiting."

Kirika seemed to be finding a reason to increase the legitimacy of the visit.

Although Hisui felt grateful inside, he did not want to trouble others too much.

"You really don't need to do this. I'm sure you're quite busy."

"It won't take up a lot of effort. I have heard from Kariya-san, it seems like Rushella-san is quite enthusiastic about participating in the sports festival? Then isn't it very necessary?"

"Well... I guess..."

"Then stop making excuses. Saturday afternoon is fine, right? I will contact you about the specific time and location later."

"...Yes."

"...Well then, see you on Saturday."

Concealing a shy expression, Kirika left after speaking.

During her departure, the lively spring in her step was almost like a dance.

Although Hisui's unease was not completely laid to rest, the bell rang for the end of the lunch break and he had no choice but to make his way to the cleaning grounds.

Translator's Notes and References:

1. In Japanese, Oogami sounds the same as the word for wolf.

Chapter 2 - Witch's Mansion

In the darkness, only a pale hand could be seen vaguely.

Beside the street light, a dark figure was clad in a black cape.

Engulfed in the shadows, even the figure's outline was difficult to discern.

Only the pale and delicate hand, extending out from the cape, was visible under the dim lighting, as though showing off its dazzling existence amidst the darkness.

The slender fingers were holding a small jar.

"Ah, I've obtained something interesting."

The quiet whispers echoed in the darkness.

A woman's voice. It sounded bewitching yet chilling to the bone.

Were it whispered by the listener's ear, surely one would break out in goosebumps with terror traveling throughout the body.

"Perhaps, this thing could be used to confirm if the plan would succeed or not. However, it seems a bit early for the main event to start immediately."

Her voice sounded slightly lost.

After a moment of silence, a person's presence appeared.

Turning around the corner was a high school student on her way home.

Dressed in her school uniform, the girl was walking with her head bowed.

Seeing her appearance, the figure in the dark smiled, her red lips forming the shape of a crescent.

"An excellent opportunity."

Who just arrived did not matter at all.

She simply wanted to take the opportunity to test things out.

This was neither fate nor preordained inevitability.

Simply because this girl happened to pass by.

The girl did not notice the threat hiding by the street light and was about to walk past there.

The girl's slender arm was grabbed by a pale hand.

"...?"

As a hint of wariness flashed across the girl's eyes, she looked in the figure's direction.

...Only to see a open jar presented before her eyes.

No liquid was being poured out. Instead, a red gas entered her nostrils.

"...!?"

The hand under the cape held onto the girl without letting go, ignoring her incessant coughing.

A moment later, a white mist-like gas was exhaled from the girl's mouth.

The gas expanded in the darkness and gradually gained self-awareness.

Then it took on a distinct and humanoid outline, down to the very details.

"Very well."

Having confirmed the effects, the dark figure left the girl.

Then melding into the darkness, she vanished without trace.

Left behind alone, the girl covered her mouth as she checked out her surroundings.

Perhaps due to inhaling the gas, her consciousness was a little hazy.

Although she was unable to figure out what had happened, in the end, she still continued on her way home.

Random passersby showed a surprised gaze upon seeing the girl.

A bizarre scene.

Like a mirror image, a figure was walking in the opposite direction away from the girl's back.

Clothing, hairstyle, physique—Everything was identical.

Regarding this clone that had departed behind her...

The girl was completely unaware.

On Saturday afternoon, Hisui arrived at Kirika's home as agreed.

Fortunately, he did not get lost and arrived on time.

A western mansion that stood out even in this high-class residential neighborhood—On first impressions, it was already obvious that it was Kirika's home.

A vast and majestic western style garden was fully visible even from outside.

With some nervousness, Hisui adjusted his loosened casual tie and pressed the intercom next to the gate.

The inhabitant had apparently been waiting for a long time—

"The door will be opened immediately."

Kirika answered then directed Hisui through the garden to a spacious entryway.

Everything was fine up until this point.

But when Kirika opened the door to welcome him, clear displeasure appeared on her face instantly.

"...Welcome."

"Thank you for your hospitality."

"Yes, we're here to enjoy your hospitality!"

Rushella smiled while speaking from beside Hisui.

Even worse, she had her arm entwined around Hisui's.

Although fearful of getting lost could be considered a reason, recently, whenever they went out, Rushella always insisted in walking arm in arm.

"Umm... Senpai..."

"...Never mind. This sort of development could be described as inevitable. It's my fault for not specifying clearly beforehand. I should have expected that you could not possibly leave her alone at home unattended on a holiday. It is my oversight. However... Why are the rest of you here!?"

Next to Rushella... were Mei and Eruru as well.

"Oh dear~ Senpai, stealing a march isn't a very nice thing to do, is it? Even I've never invited Hi-kun to my home, are you getting ahead of yourself?"

Dressed in a low-cut autumn camisole, Mei was smiling seductively.

Similarly dressed in decisive attire, Kirika was wearing a high-class blouse and miniskirt.

"...Oh well, I should have expected you to arrive uninvited as well. But Kariya-san, I never would have thought that even you would come..."

Kirika glared resentfully, but Eruru was unfazed by her gaze.

"I simply wish to know the results of the analysis. Well, if Hisui-san were coming alone, I had no intention of visiting originally, after all, I have no wish of being glared at by you like this... But since Rushella followed along, in order to prevent her from causing trouble, I should be present to supervise her. Rather, I am here in consideration for you, right?"

"Indeed, since those two are here, it is better that you came too. Anyway, that's enough for now, hurry and come inside."

"Okay... Ah, I've brought a little something."

Saying that, Hisui handed over the tea and western confectionery he had brought.

Kirika accepted them expressionlessly and had the maid beside her lead Hisui's group into the house.

"Hmm, this house is so spacious... I want to live in a place like this! Rather, I'm supposed to live here! This kind of house is more fitting for me!"

"A vampire living in this kind of house would attract too much attention. By the way, I never knew what a spoiled rich girl you are. Upon comparison, my gifts seem a bit too cheap. Is Senpai angry because of that?"

"Clearly not."

"Obviously not."

Two of the culprits incurring Kirika's displeasure—Mei and Eruru—refuted Hisui's speculation simultaneously.

"Really... Yesterday when I sent the text message to confirm the time and place, she used a whole ton of emoticons in her reply and looked quite happy."

"I would expect that."

"Poor child."

"What exactly do you two know...?"

Hisui remained uneasy. The group went through the house and arrived in a garden.

"Wow..."

Although Hisui had no artistic sense for flowers, the countless blooming flowers, centered around roses, still caused him to gasp in amazement.

Using the traits of different flowers in a perfect combination, this space produced a sense of harmony.

Compared to an ordinary reception hall, this place was undoubtedly more suited for entertaining guests.

Beneath the warm sunlight, the weather was currently perfect for an outdoor chat.

Passing through a small path that was filled with floral fragrance, they reached a set of white tables and chairs.

A lady seated in a wheelchair was already waiting for them. Noticing the arriving group, she smiled warmly.

"Welcome, welcome. Come, please have a seat here."

Hence, Hisui's group took their seats.

The first moment he laid eyes on the woman, Hisui understood that she must be Kirika's grandmother.

Just as Kirika mentioned, she was a true native of England. Friendly and gentle, she shared a certain resemblance with Kirika. In her youth, she must have had no lack of romantic pursuers.

Despite her advanced age, she was the kind of elder whose outstanding poise and presence was something that probably everyone aspired to achieve when they reached old age.

Since she was Kirika's teacher, naturally, she must also be a "witch." Nevertheless, her predominantly white attire and shawl gave off an impression quite removed from that identity. Knitting while sitting by a warm hearth and telling stories of her youth to grandchildren would probably match her current look better.

"Umm, a pleasure to meet you. My name is Kujou Hisui. Your granddaughter has helped me so much all this time..."

"Hello, you are too kind. Nice to meet you too, my name is Welfica. You are Miraluka's... Son? Putting it that way might sound a bit strange. Perhaps it might be more fitting if I call you her younger brother... Would it not?"

"You knew... her...?"

Hisui stared in surprise at the elderly lady before him.

Hearing the unexpected name, Rushella's face turned grim.

Even that "Pure of the Pure" vampire last time had not seen Miraluka in person before.

In the end, Miraluka only existed in Hisui's memories alone.

A sanctuary where none may trespass, a set of memories that none may share.

Nevertheless, today they finally met a human who knew her.

"You are... When did you meet her...?"

"A very long time ago... Back then, I was about your age. I only saw her once. Speaking of which, it's unexpectedly ironic that she would pass away earlier than a human like me."

Welfica reminisced.

For this elder who had experienced all manners of the world's harsh realities and separations brought about by death, her encounter with Miraluka the 'True Ancestor' was still a special memory.

"Is the tea ready?"

While Hisui was still immersed in his memories, Kirika returned with a tray of tea ware.

"Oh... Thanks."

"Please have some tea first. There is no need to rush the conversation."

Like the times in the club classroom, Kirika set out the tea ware and started a small-scale tea party.

The tea she brewed was delicious as usual. On the plates were also various exquisite snacks that were meticulously prepared.

"Kirika-chan, your skills are becoming better and better. Is it because you've found someone you like?"

"S-Seriously, please don't talk about that..."

The grandmother's joke caused Kirika to blush.

Despite the flawless image of perfection she presented at school, in front of her grandmother, Kirika was just a girl at the prime of youth.

Seeing the model student showing a new side to her, Hisui could not help but smile while drinking the tea.

Seeing the conversation drifting further and further away, Eruru spoke up to return to the main topic.

"By the way, Welfica-san, did you come to any conclusion regarding the fragments I handed to you earlier? I am certain that you must have heard the entire story from your granddaughter already..."

"Yes... I've seen them already. Both fragments seem to come from finely-crafted coffins. Even back when I was young, that type of top-class craftsmanship would still have been rare. However..."

"However...?"

"Actually, one of the fragments is recent... Even though I say recent, it must have been twenty or thirty years probably. For a vampire's coffin, it is far too new."

"Vampire coffins are usually antiques. That goes all the more for high-ranking vampires. The longer a coffin's age, the more powerful the magical power infused in it and serves to augment the owner's prestige. The coffin that you mentioned as recent, which one is it?"

"Not the one belonging to the 'Pure of the Pure' but the other one. I think... It probably belongs to the little lady here?"

Welfica calmly pointed out the key person.

Judging from the tone of her voice, Kirika probably had not revealed everything to her. Rather, she saw through Rushella's identity on her own.

At this moment, Rushella nodded, currently sitting in the shade that Kirika had prepared for her.

"...Exactly. So, what's similar between that Fergus guy's coffin and mine?"

"Made by the same craftsman... As much as I'd like to gloss over it like that, the fact of the matter is not so simple. These two coffins were created at least a hundred years apart. Probably not by the same person. Or perhaps... They were created in similar locations through similar methods... Or rather..."

"Rather?"

Eruru leaned forward and asked.

She was quite intrigued by this matter.

"Her coffin was based on that 'Pure of the Pure' vampire's... Or least, an imitation created by referencing that type of high-class coffin in order to reproduce the same craftsmanship... That is the impression given."

"What is going on here?"

Hisui muttered, quite interested.

However, at the center of the conversation topic, Rushella remarked with displeasure:

"Why is my coffin an imitation when I'm a 'True Ancestor' myself!? Isn't the order completely wrong? This is very displeasing!"

"'True Ancestor'...? You are...? How is that possible, apart from Miraluka, all of them already..."

Welfica's face was filled with surprise.

Could it be that she, like Hisui, knew a little about the truth of the 'True Ancestors'?

"That person again..."

Hearing Miraluka's name, Rushella complained resentfully with her fist clenched.

Indeed, no matter where, that name always popped up to cause trouble.

"Please calm down. Whether your coffin is new or not, it does not diminish your existence. Besides, it could very well be possible that the coffin was damaged and repaired for some reason. A mere coffin is not going to affect your prestige and position, right?"

Eruru interjected to relieve the tension and avert catastrophe.

Rushella found her explanation reasonable and cooled down her temper.

"Well... That's true too."

"Welfica-san, anything else?"

"Nothing special... Most likely, simply comparing coffins would not yield any further clues. At the very least, her coffin, as a vampire's belonging, it really is in the latest style. However, its creator must also have researched coffins that were passed down since antiquity, distilling their very essence to craft this coffin. I am absolutely certain of that."

"In other words, we need to find a different angle huh. Say, who the heck are you, anyway?"

"No idea..."

Rushella turned her face away and sulked.

Precisely because she did not know, that was why they came here to investigate.

But right now, her origins had become even more mysterious. Even worse, the name of Hisui's parent, whom no one else had met, came up again without warning.

The more Rushella thought about it, the angrier she got. All she could do is wolf down the snacks without saying another word.

Seeing the mood cooling down suddenly, Kirika stood up.

"Oh, Kujou-kun... The light-blocking agent is ready, let me get it for you first in case I forget later."

"Oh thanks..."

"Come with me to get it. Oh, also regarding the sports festival, may I discuss something with you? Last time, you said you were willing to help, is that right?"

"Yeah, that's what I said..."

"The materials are in my room. Let us talk there."

Saying that, Kirika left the table.

Although Hisui was a little perplexed, he felt that refusing would not be right.

After taking a glance at Rushella, in the end, he still stood up and followed Kirika to enter the house.

Rushella was about to get up and call to him but Mei and Eruru stopped her.

"What are you two doing!?"

"Let's just turn a blind eye this once. Once in a while should be fine."

"If you try to follow, you could very well end up suffering a witch's curse. Take this opportunity with Kujou-san not around. Now you can boldly ask all you want—about his family."

Hearing Eruru's advice, Rushella reluctantly sat down in her spot.

The old lady before her continued to smile affectionately.

"May I... ask you? About... Miraluka..."

"I shall tell you everything I know."

Welfica agreed immediately and chuckled amiably.

"Please sit anywhere you like."

"Okay..."

Despite answering affirmatively, Hisui was still standing in one spot at a loss.

Kirika had taken him to her bedroom.

Although the furniture was not as luxurious as Rushella's room, the stuff was still quite high-class. Both the room and the bed were quite large.

No, the main point was... This was a girl's room.

Apart from Miraluka and Rushella's room, Hisui had never stepped foot into any other female's room.

Probably due to this new feeling, Hisui could not help but look around.

Completely devoid of casual entertainment like celebrity posters or fashion magazines, the prim and proper room matched Kirika's style perfectly.

Textbooks and reference books were arranged neatly on her desk, the perfect testament to her excellent grades.

Turning his gaze, Hisui found her bed filled with cute, giant plushies. Beside her pillow was a fuzzy teddy bear.

Was that bear a body pillow...? As this thought crossed his mind, her adorability was skyrocketing.

It suited her quite well, how unexpected.

To be honest, Hisui really wanted to swap places with that bear.

"What is the matter, why are you spacing out while standing there?"

"Oh, nothing..."

Trembling, Hisui had no choice but to sit down where he stood.

"Why are you sitting there? True, although the only chair here is the one in front of my desk... Why don't you sit on the bed?"

"...May I?"

"You may."

Hisui cautiously approached the bed side and sat on the edge near the foot of the bed.

His body instantly sank into the mattress. It looked like it must be quite comfortable to sleep on.

"...Hey, what kind of rubbish am I thinking?"

Hisui quietly reprimanded himself and shook his head to dispel indecent thoughts.

Kirika immediately leaned over and sat down beside Hisui.

A fragrance instantly occupied his sense of smell.

"Why are you leaning so close?"

"This is my room. It is my freedom to sit anywhere I want, right?"

"...True."

"Here you go, the light-blocking agent. I made more than usual, so it should be enough for both the sports festival and during practice."

"Oh thanks."

Hisui received from Kirika's hands a sealed, wide-mouthed jar, just large enough to hold on one's palm. Quite sufficient in quantity.

"I don't know why but that girl is so fired up for the relay race... She even talked about going to practice. I guess she likes sports but PE class happens to be the one class that she can only watch. Must be a lot of pent up frustration she's been suppressing inside, right?"

"Your wording is quite lewd. What do you mean by pent up frustration?"

"Oh I don't mean it in that way."

Before he knew it, Kirika's face was up close, right in front of his face.

Very close.

Too close.

"Umm, Senpai... Didn't you say you had something to talk about for the sports festival?"

"Those issues don't matter. Right now, we are not lacking in manpower. If you're needed... I will message you to let you know."

"Then... Why did we come to your room? You could have given me the stuff on your way back..."

"You don't get it?"

Kirika leaned in even closer.

Almost close enough for their lips to touch any second.

A sweet fragrance filled his nostrils at the same time.

Unlike the scent of shampoo, it seemed to be perfume.

Nevertheless, even though it was currently a holiday, using perfume did not seem to be Kirika's style since she adhered rigorously to school rules.

Besides, that was something that was supposed to be used on a date with someone you like, but right now, she's simply inviting me to her home as a guest—There's no reason for her to be using perfume, right?

"U-Ummm..."

Crap.

If this continues, I'm in big trouble.

But... I can't muster any strength.

As Kirika leaned closer, Hisui was pushed down beneath her body and lying face up on the bed.

Due to being pushed down by Rushella and Mei regularly, Hisui realized that his current situation was quite precarious.

Yes, she's serious this time for real.

"S-Senpai...?"

Kirika's soft bosom was pressing against his chest. Although not to the Rushella or Mei's level, hers was quite sufficiently voluptuous already.

Faint glimpses of high-class, light purple lingerie could be seen from her neckline. It suited her quite well.

Her long and slender legs were entangling him.

Next, Kirika released her long and carefully tied hair.

Her wavy and gorgeous hair exuded the scent of shampoo.

But some sort of fragrance, even more concentrated, was filling the room.

Sweet, bewitching—A fragrance that banished one's rationality.

Hisui focused his eyes and found Kirika's expression a little strange.

Her face was bright red from excitement and her gaze was unsteady.

Hisui surmised that he probably looked the same.

How strange, his heart was racing like mad.

His body felt boiling hot and exhausted, probably not simply because Kirika was pressed up close against him.

Furthermore... Blood was currently flowing towards his lower body.

"What is... going on...?"

Hisui turned his head with difficulty and looked around, searching for answers.

He soon found the cause.

In a corner of the room, a scented candle was lit.

Amidst colored glass, the flickering flame exuded a bewitching beauty, full of fantasy.

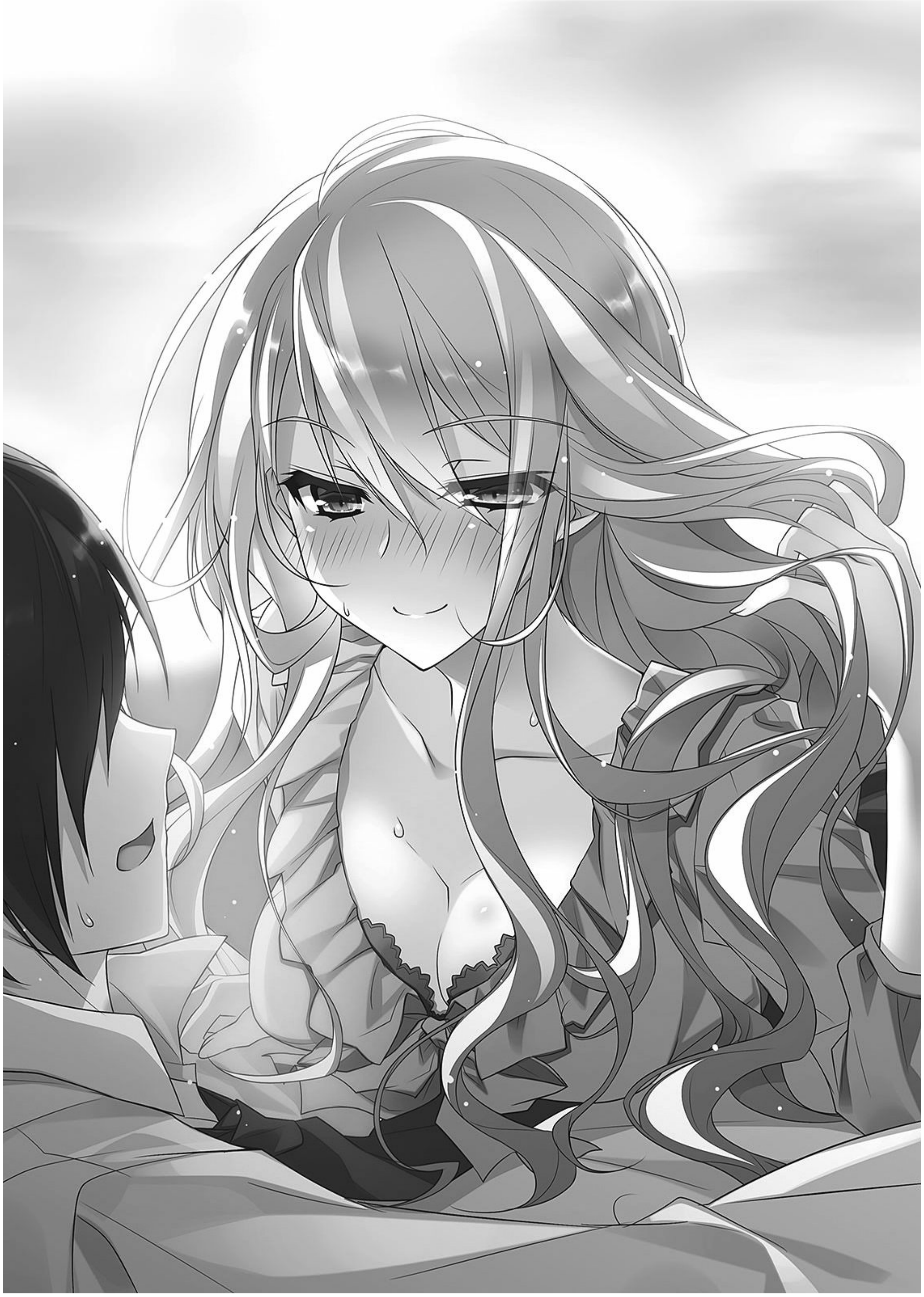
The fragrance rising from there was filled with a seductive sweetness.

"Senpai, what's with that candle?"

"Grandma... gave that to me. Specially prepared by witches... made from an aphrodisiac indispensable for nights of passion. She said... when the fragrance fills the entire room... it'd help me..."

"H-Hey...! How could your grandmother recklessly give something so outrageous to her granddaughter... Thanks to her, each of us' virginity is in danger here!"

"Grandma said... Back in the day, she relied on this to conquer Grandpa too..."



"Woah, that's some dark history there. Hey Senpai, can you calm down a bit? Let's get up first..."

"You don't like me?"

Kirika asked with worry while her finger traced circles on Hisui's chest.

"No, it's not like I dislike you..."

"You spend all your time with Rushella-san, you are in the same class as Sudou-san, and you are always partnering with Kariya-san... Only me, you leave out?"

"No, it's not like that..."

Crap.

Seriously, crap.

Most importantly, Hisui was feeling his own consciousness getting hazy.

Before he knew it, Kirika had already unbuttoned Hisui's shirt. Her blouse was also open, revealing a light purple bra.

Her other hand was reaching towards Hisui's belt. Her lips were approaching.

The fragrance's effects were causing Hisui to lose strength throughout his body.

Even evading a kiss was beyond him.

"So... I'll listen a bit. The story about that Miraluka."

Rushella crossed her arms, scowling as she spoke.

Welfica closed her eyes momentarily then returned her teacup to the tray.

"Please forgive me for answering your query with a question. In actual fact, you need not ask me... Why not ask Hisui-kun directly? Most likely, he would know better than me. After all, compared to me, he spent far more time together with her."

"...No."

Rushella looked displeased. Just as Welfica pointed out, she had plenty of opportunities to ask Hisui about Miraluka.

Although Hisui was always tight-lipped about this matter, had Rushella insisted forcefully, he would probably compromise.

However, for some reason, Rushella did not want to listen to him talk about this subject.

She did not want to hear him talk about other vampires.

"Kujou-san was raised by the vampire Miraluka, hence it is inevitable that his perspective of his benefactor would be biased... In actual fact, he definitely views things with rose-tinted glasses. From a neutral point of view, in search of her true nature as a vampire, we also wish to clear up the matter."

Eruru ignored the conflict in Rushella's heart and supplemented in a calm tone of voice.

Like Rushella, she had plenty of opportunities to ask Hisui about Miraluka. She had not, out of consideration for Hisui's feelings... as well as the reasons she outlined just now.

"A boy raised by a 'True Ancestor'... Indeed, my perspective should be different from yours."

"You must have heard about the earlier commotion caused by the 'Pure of the Pure' vampire on the streets. Although the incident was resolved, it is possible that there still exist more hard-liner vampires who insist on maintaining vampire bloodlines. And the key lies in the 'True Ancestors'— If what you and Kujou-san say is true, then there should not be any 'True Ancestors' existing in this world anymore. What is going on?"

Eruru approached the core of the matter.

Ignoring Rushella who was sitting on the side, head hung in dejection, Eruru leaned forward, eager to seek answers.

"...I don't know either. More accurately, the secret of the 'True Ancestors' is only known to Miraluka herself as well as direct descendants of the bloodline. When I met her in the past, I only heard a few words. It was a very long time ago, as it so happened, I was similar in age as you are now

—"

Welfica began to recount tirelessly.

In past days, she must have been as young and beautiful as Kirika. During that time in the springtime of her youth, she encountered a vampire.

"She was truly a beauty, to the point that it makes me reluctant to apply the description 'beautiful' on anyone else. From appearance, she only looked two or three years older than I was back then, yet her words leaked heaviness, profundity and darkness between the lines."

"What did she say to you?"

"It was simply small talk. Nothing beyond the realm of casual conversation. Perhaps to her, the entire world did not matter at all. Lonely... No, solitary would fit her best as a description. Vampires generally have a strong sense of kin and would devote their utmost efforts to strengthen bonds of kinship, but she was the complete opposite. She said she had neither family nor subordinates. Supposedly, she had never given birth to children nor take anyone as her servant."

"In other words, she killed every human she drank blood from?"

Eruru asked sharply.

Although she was compelled to drink blood in order to survive as well, she had no intention of viewing this cursed fate with calm indifference.

"Probably. In actual fact, she did it before my eyes. However, everyone whose blood was sucked was smiling, dying in joy and ecstasy. Considering they were homeless people on death's door, to them perhaps it might have been salvation instead."

"...What a weirdo. If I were her, I wouldn't suck blood from that kind of people. The taste must be absolutely terrible."

Rushella grumbled.

Precisely as a member of the same race, she found it all the more inexplicable.

On the other hand, Eruru frowned in a frightening manner.

"That was probably hypocrisy. Granting euthanasia to the dying, thinking it is fine to kill those who no longer wished to live... Can this constitute justification?"

"Impossible. She understood this clearer than anything. In order to survive, blood must be drunk. And she wanted to live on. Despite losing everything, she had to live on in solitude, living in the world that He saved—That was what she said. To her, perhaps drinking human blood was more like a kind of mental torture."

Welfica sighed in forlorn and sipped some tea. Having traveled far along her journey in life, almost reaching its end, perhaps precisely because of that, she could understand the feelings of a vampire whose life was endless.

"I was young back then, finding adults ugly and hating this world that was rife with war and conflict. So I begged her to drink my blood. I told her that I wished to be eternally beautiful just like her."

"...!"

Eruru stared wide-eyed in shock.

Humans who voluntarily offered their necks to vampires were definitely no small number.

And precisely because such people existed, that was how dhampirs came to be born.

"Please forgive my rudeness but that was truly foolish. To voluntarily give up on being human, that cannot be dismissed as mere youthful impulsiveness, right?"

"...Indeed. In the end, she refused me. She said she would continue to live on without needing anyone. Not too long earlier, the last of her peers had been destroyed. She was the only one remaining from among the ones who drank His blood on that day. In order to preserve His existence forever, she had to live on. Without giving birth to children, without taking in servants, for that would only cause her to become weak... After saying that, she vanished before my eyes. To this day, I am still very grateful to her. Without her rejecting me, I would not have such a cute granddaughter right now, neither would I be able to enjoy tea with you all under the sun."

Welfica smiled affectionately and placed her empty teacup onto the tray.

After a moment's silence, Rushella stood up and urged Eruru and Mei to get going.

"Let's go home. We should call Hisui too."

"This is enough? In the end, we didn't really learn anything about Miraluka? If I were you, in preparation for future strategies, it'd be better to continue digging for more info, right?"

Mei rested her face on one hand while she asked but Rushella did not heed her advice.

"Everything that needs to be asked has already been asked. That Miraluka was always alone. She definitely has no idea of that Fergus guy's movements. Even if she met him, she wouldn't have helped him."

"...Perhaps you are right. I have asked about everything I wanted to find out. But what about you? Why would a solitary 'True Ancestor' save a human boy, adopt him and finally..."

At this point, Eruru paused in her words.

She did not hold any respect for vampires. However, through the fragmentary descriptions of Miraluka's last moments that Hisui had given, Eruru could not help but feel respect.

"...Finally, why did she save Kujou-san and dying herself? Do you not care to know?"

Eruru deliberately used the word "dying."

This was the minimum level of respect she offered to Miraluka.

Rather than directed towards a vampire, it was directed towards Hisui's deceased family, directed towards her as a woman.

"I know without needing to ask. Besides, I've already heard roughly what happened from Hisui. That woman saved him, took him in, raised him... Everything on a whim. That's what Hisui said. Supposedly, that's what Miraluka said herself."

"Then why would she do all that for his sake?"

Welfica asked quietly.

She was the only person present who had met Miraluka once in person and could not help but feel perplexed by the change that had occurred to the one in her memory.

"She gained feelings. That's all there is to it. She fell for an insignificant human. That's all. To think she rambled so many lies, what an inane woman."

Rushella's words were filled with barbs but was not meant as an intentional insult.

Rather, her heart was filled with sadness and empathy.

"Gaining feelings... That wasn't one-sided, right? Hi-kun... Didn't he feel the same?"

Especially sharp regarding matters between genders, Mei spoke up expressionlessly.

Her rival was not Rushella. Miraluka was truly the most formidable enemy—She had already sensed that vaguely before but it turned out that her fears were not unfounded.

"Perhaps. What a useless guy, always thinking of someone dead. What do you call that, lingering feelings, right!?"

Rushella loudly ended the conversation and walked into the house.

Mei and Eruru bowed toward Welfica and followed.

"You're welcome to visit again any time. Although I have no idea how many days I have left, so long as I continue to live, let me help as much as I can."

"Yes, I will visit again."

Rushella smiled and the trio left.

"Safe, finally..."

Hisui's virginity crisis was over.

More accurately, the crisis had stopped for now.

The attacking Kirika was currently lying peacefully on Hisui's chest, fallen asleep.

Of course, this was not the aftermath. Kirika had suddenly fainted before she could make contact with Hisui's lips.

The reason was unknown.

Probably because the perfume's effects were too strong... As well as fatigue.

Academics, the student council's activities, Hisui's request, everything combined with her uncompromising personality probably resulted in Kirika's sleep deprivation.

"Really... I'm very sorry."

Hisui took care not to rouse Kirika and quietly escaped. He opened the window for ventilation.

The fresh air rushing into the room finally brought Hisui's body back to normal. The unbearable pain in his lower body finally subsided.

Although he wanted to escape the scene before the sleeping beauty woke up, Hisui felt that he could not leave her disheveled clothing alone.

If he left without doing anything, he would suffer divine retribution.

"...This isn't sexual harassment. Please forgive me."

Muttering to himself in search of excuses, Hisui helped Kirika arrange her mussed hair and gently covered her in a blanket.

Upon further examination, Hisui could not help but admit that she was actually the most feminine out of this bunch of girls.

Her slightly older age probably factored in, Kirika possessed a certain charm that Rushella and Mei lacked.

To be honest, Hisui was that close to crossing the line just now.

"...I guess I'm really wasting a precious opportunity."

Just as Hisui sighed, someone barged into the room without knocking.

"Say, it's about time to go home... Hey, what are you doing!?"

Crashing through the door, Rushella suddenly pointed in his direction.

Mei and Eruru followed behind her.

"Hey hey... Hi-kun... What's going on!? I reluctantly allowed you two to have some alone time in a room, why is your shirt wide open...?"

Mei's eyes burned with hostility... Rather, it was murderous intent.

When her murderous intent reached a maximum, lasers would shoot out of her eyes. This was not a metaphor. Hisui knew.

"Could it be... This was what you intended from the start?"

Kaclick. Eruru's dainty hand was holding a heavy handgun.

Although Hisui was always baffled by where she pulled the gun out every time, he knew quite well the accuracy and power of her gunshots.

"Wait up, calm down, all of you... I-It's not what you think!"

"The two of you alone for roughly half an hour... Well, that's totally enough for one round, right?"

"Why is Uno-senpai asleep on the bed...?"

The three girls approached in a highly intimidating manner.

Probably woken up by the surrounding horrifying atmosphere, Kirika rubbed her eyes and sat up.

"Hmm, what happened...?"

"Oh, what perfect timing for you to wake up! H-Hurry and explain! Tell them this was just a prank you played, Senpai!"

While pleading to the witness, Hisui accidentally stared at Kirika's chest.

Indeed, her chest exactly.

Before putting Plan C into motion, Kirika had unbuttoned her blouse to reveal the light purple bra, which was a daring choice of color for her.

If only that was all.

However, even though that was not totally fine, it was not like Hisui had not seen bras many times already.

But because the bra was pushed slightly out of position when she sat up, it could no longer cover her breasts properly and almost revealed them completely.

Feeling Hisui's gaze, Kirika also looked down at her chest.

Fortunately, the most critical spots were not exposed, but certain light pink and circular outlines were already on the verge of entering into view.

Tottering on the thin line between exposure and non-exposure, the view was even more provocative.

Without exception, any male would focus his gaze in this kind of situation, desperately trying to catch a glimpse of what lay beneath.

Yes, Hisui was staring intently.

Then their gazes met.

Kirika's face turned increasingly red.

Next, the female trio behind Hisui also went red for a different reason.

With a witch in front and monsters behind, Hisui was caught in the middle. Confronted with the sight of Kirika's chest that he could not tear his eyes off from, Hisui offered his honest opinion in a hollow voice.

"Beautiful breasts, perfectly sized."

Those became his last words.

"Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!"

Kirika screamed shrilly.

Tearfully, she burrowed beneath her blanket while another scream sounded from beside her.

"No, wait! This is a misunderstanding..."

"You're noisy, so shut up!"

"Hi-kun... Would you mind dying once?"

"You need to be shot between the legs."

Several minutes later, Rushella and the girls started on their way home.

Kirika remained shut in her room, so Welfica had to see their guests off in her granddaughter's place.

"...He's still young. Why not show him some mercy this once?"

The old lady advised affectionately. On the other hand, Rushella and the girls bowed and bid their farewells expressionlessly.

Four visitors had arrived but only three took their leave.

In Rushella's hands were the remains of a completely pummeled youth... Rather, it was a body resembling a certain someone, being dragged gruffly behind her. Who could it be? No passerby could tell.

Chapter 3 - Doppelganger

"Why must we go to school so early in the morning!?"

"Stop making such a fuss. You're partly to blame too."

Early in the morning, Hisui and Rushella were rubbing their sleepy eyes while hurrying to school.

There was still a lot of time before class started but the two of them had left home very early and come to school.

To help Kirika.

After the incident in her room, Hisui had sent her a letter of apology by text message... But she did not reply.

He had visited the student council office to apologize in person, but Kirika turned her face away and ignored him.

Speaking of which, weren't you the one who pushed me down first... The truth accidentally slipped out of Hisui's mouth, causing Kirika to slap him with a blush, making matters worse.

Apparently, her sanity had been stolen by the scented candle and she was quite bothered by it.

Perhaps she actually had no idea about the scent's true purpose and simply wanted to spend time together, just the two of them in a room... Drinking tea.

Hisui did not have anyone whom he could discuss with for advice. Racking his brains, he still had no idea what to do. In the end, Kirika sent him a text message last night on her own.

I have something I want your help with tomorrow. Come to school at seven sharp.

Naturally, Hisui agreed readily. Hence, he arrived early at school today.

He could have let Rushella continue sleeping, but going out and leaving her behind at home would definitely get him a noisy earful after the fact. Thus he had no choice but to wake her up early to set off to school together.

"Ooh~... So sleepy... I didn't drink enough blood either..."

"Stop talking, the one who drinks from my neck nonstop the minute she opened her eyes."

"Fool, that position was no good at all! I knew it, nothing beats lying on top of you while you're sleeping, having a good long look at your sleeping face, rubbing your cheeks, then blowing into your ear, finally drinking your blood while hugging tightly!"

"What the heck did you do to me...?"

Usually, Hisui awoke to the pain of fangs sinking into his skin. Anything before that was unknown to him.

Deducing from what Rushella just said, she probably toys with him thoroughly before biting him.

"Recently, I keep dreaming of something soft pressing against my face, rubbing away, almost suffocating me. Is that because of you?"

"Hmph, is that the kind of dream you had? Speaking of which, I always feel something hard against my leg when hugging you, is this related?"

"Sorry, just forget about it. I don't want to talk about this."

"Why!? It feels like it gets bigger the more I touch it..."

"Stop talking about it... Please stop..."

Red in the face, Hisui silently went through the school gates.

The school yard was empty. Recently, club activities had entered a seasonal low and there were no students doing morning training in the sports ground.

But Hisui saw a familiar figure and walked over there.

"Eh, Class Rep...?"

"Kujou-kun..."

Dressed in gym clothes, Reina was in a corner of the school yard.

"What are you doing here so early? Could it be that you're getting up early to practice for the relay race?"

"Yes... I'm the final leg, after all. I haven't been running lately, so I need to get back into shape as quickly as possible..."

Reina looked down without much confidence.

Being devoted to training was a good thing. And this sort of responsible mindset was very much in line with her personality—But somehow, Hisui felt that something was not right.

Since she did not belong to the track and field club, why was she so intent on the sports festival's relay race?

"Hmm, that's wonderful spirit. Why don't you learn from her!?"

"Spare me. By the way, Class Rep, you don't need to push yourself so hard. No one will blame you even if we lose. I won't let them either."

Hisui's words made Reina blush.

But she still continued to look down, like the time when she decided to be the final leg.

"Yes, but after all, I was selected... I haven't really gone running seriously ever since middle school, so I do need some last-minute practice at least."

"You've been participating normally in PE class. So it's not some kind of physical ailment, right? Could it be mental trauma?"

As soon as he spoke, Hisui realized he had misspoken.

Because Reina instantly went expressionless and bit her lip with her head bowed.

In order to relieve the heavy atmosphere, Hisui changed the subject.

"Well, if anything, a relay is everyone's responsibility. In a class like ours, no matter how hard you try, Class Rep, if this girl messes up before passing the baton to you, all your efforts could end up wasted."

"What did you say!?"

Hisui pointing the finger at her caused Rushella to scream with displeasure.

But she apparently did not understand the meaning of his words.

"...What is a 'baton'?"

She was asking seriously.

"Eh, this kind of basic question? What did you think the relay race was about?"

"Everyone running in sequence as decided!"

"Yes, that's not a wrong description, but you're definitely mistaken on one point. In a relay race, everyone is linked by the baton. You basically hold a small rod while running then pass it to the next person, this goes on repeatedly. Finally, when you pass the baton to Class Rep and she finishes running, then the race ends."

"...In other words, if I pass this parasol to her instead of the baton, that's against the rules!?"

"Yeah, that's right. I feel like you're really gonna do that, so please pay more attention. If you do something like that, there's no way I can cover for you."

Hearing Hisui's mutters, Rushella frantically threw her schoolbag to the ground.

"Grrrrr... In that case, to prevent making a mistake during the race, I must practice more! Class Rep, help me!"

"Eh, ah, okay... Passing the baton... That's a crucial part."

"Very well, let us not dally. Hisui, I have something urgent now to do!"

Like a super busy person, Rushella started to put Kirika's light-blocking agent on her body.

Then she even sprayed it on her hair to further improve the sunlight resistance.

Hisui had already told Reina that Rushella had a frail constitution that was weak towards sunlight, so Reina did not find her behavior strange.

However, just when Rushella was about to strip and change into gym clothes, Reina finally spoke up to stop her.

"W-W-Wait up, Draculea-san... Your clothes...!"

"Hmm?"

Her uniform top was already completely unbuttoned. Rushella was about to unbuckle her belt and paused in response.

The unexpected series of high-speed undressing movements took place before Hisui's eyes throughout the entire process. At this moment, Rushella and Hisui met gazes.

Naturally, her face went red instantly.

"Y-Y-Y-You jerk, what are you looking at!?"

"No, it's you who suddenly stripped..."

Just as Rushella swung her fist as usual, her skirt slid down.

"Wah, that's so bold!"

"I told you not to look——!!"

The second punch struck Hisui in the chin, flooring him face up.

The moment he fell down, a dazzling bit of white fabric seemed to have entered his view. Knowing that a third punch was unavoidable if he spoke up, Hisui chose to remain silent.

Several minutes later, Rushella was all changed by the time Hisui stood up.

"...So, you want to practice?"

"That's right, victory is in my hands!"

"...Yeah, okay, remember the rules then. So, Class Rep... I'll leave her... with you? I still have something else to do."

"Yes, okay. Then first of all... Let's begin with some warmups?"

"Okay, watch me!"

Then casting Hisui to the back of her mind, Rushella focused on morning training.

Despite the unease in his mind, Hisui still departed after some hesitation.

Previously, Rushella had insisted on sitting out of all outdoor PE classes, but now with Kirika's help, perhaps she could participate henceforth.

In any case, with Reina watching her, it should be fine.

Hisui could not help but smile while heading towards Kirika's rendezvous point.

The rendezvous point was in a corner of the school... The gym equipment storeroom.

It was a separate building from the classroom block. Apart from PE class, Hisui almost never went there.

"Finally here."

Arms crossed, Kirika was waiting at the storeroom's entrance.

Although Hisui was a little late, the time was still much earlier than when he usually came to school.

"Where's Rushella-san? Why are you alone?"

"She's training for the relay race. There's a capable girl looking after her, so it should be fine."

"I see... Very well."

"So, what do you need me for, Senpai?"

"I need your help with confirming the equipment for the sports festival. Counting tents, hurdles and the like. These will be taken out to place during first period today, so they need to be checked as soon as possible."

"Uh... But wouldn't it have been better to check them two days in advance?"

"...There were other things to busy with. Due to the recent shock I suffered, I couldn't concentrate when working."

Saying that, Kirika glared at him. Hisui could only avert his gaze.

Continuing the subject further would be asking for trouble.

"So, let's go in..."

"Ah, this should be locked..."

Kirika took out a set of keys she had borrowed from the staff room but it turned out to be useless. Because in actual fact, the door was not locked.

"Eh, it's open?"

"How odd..."

"Let's go in first."

Unconcerned, Hisui entered the storeroom first.

As expected, it was filled with a musty smell. Furthermore, it was dark and difficult to see the situation inside.

"I don't think there's a light here..."

"Yes. Do you know the rough layout here?"

"I do, but it'd be bad if we get locked in here."

"...Don't get any strange ideas, okay?"

Kirika walked to his side and said warily.

Did she misunderstand something about him?

Clearly, he was the one who needed to be careful around others.

What if she were to light up some weird scent and push him down?

"No, not me... It's not like I'm Sudou."

"For me... In this kind of place... I would still be reluctant... A hotel feels so immoral... Raising criticisms about upbringing... A-After that happened, my own room does not seem to be too... In the end, Kujou-kun's room would be best, I suppose...?"

Hisui seemed to be seriously misunderstood. Her thoughts were all confined in a certain direction.

Venturing deeper into the storeroom, Hisui decided to ignore the girl who was fiddling with her fingers, immersed in her delusions.

Equipment like tents should be there.

"Uh, is this it?"

In a corner of the storeroom, the metal frames for putting up tents were leaning against the wall.

Another important component, the fabric that could be said to be the tent itself, was folded and kept on a shelf next to them.

"Let's move these outside before counting them carefully?"

"Yes, since they will be put up soon, we should move them out first."

Kirika agreed. Hence, Hisui picked up a large roll of fabric.

Although it was not as heavy as the tent frame, the heavy sailcloth was still not easy to carry in his arms.

Hugging the fabric, Hisui left the room and threw it outside the storeroom.

"...Hmm?"

Throwing down the sailcloth, only then did Hisui notice.

It was damaged.

The sturdy sailcloth was not supposed to rip or tear under normal conditions, but right now, it was all torn up.

"What happened... A prank!?"

Hisui spread the sailcloth out to inspect the damage.

Behind him, still in the storeroom, Kirika called out in alarm.

"...Who is there!?"

Sensing danger, Hisui returned to the storeroom to look out.

Previously, when he entered, he had not sensed anyone... Was Kirika mistaken?

Inside the dim and vast room, if anyone hid on purpose, it would be difficult to find them.

Before Kirika unlocked the door, someone had definitely visited.

Hisui could not let Kirika handle things alone, so he went inside.

At the same time, someone cried out "Kyah!" lightly.

It was Kirika.

A figure collided into her and sent her falling.

"What are you doing here!?"

Hisui hastily rushed forward and supported Kirika before she fell.

"Wait!"

While stabilizing Kirika, Hisui reached out to grab the intruder in the storeroom.

What he touched was an arm even more slender and delicate than his.

Evidently a girl, she was also wearing the school uniform. The arm grabbed by Hisui was also holding a boxcutter, with a shred of sailcloth on the blade. Clearly the tent vandal was her.

"Hey...!"

Just as Hisui was about to subdue her, the person looked back.

Hisui was instantly stunned.

The girl's uniform was not a disguise, rather, it was perfectly natural.

She was student in this school.

And someone he recognized.

The person he had caught was Reina.

"...Why!?"

Faced with his questioning, she remained expressionless—No, a light grin was surfaced in the corner of her lips.

Unlike the gentle and moving smile she usually displayed in the classroom, it was treacherous expression of hidden malevolence.

The unexpected development made Hisui frozen on the spot.

Using this chance, Reina shook off Hisui's arm and fled.

"Wait..."

Kirika was going to chase after her, but on second thought, knowing who the culprit was already, there was probably no need to pursue relentlessly.

"Ah, Senpai, that..."

"I am fine..."

Kirika became shy and escaped from Hisui's arms. She looked fine.

"What was with that student...?"

"You saw her face?"

"I did... I see her in regularly held class committee. She is your class' representative, right? Why was she hiding in the storeroom and even cutting up the tent?"

"This..."

Hisui wanted to deny.

She was not someone who did such things. Neither was there any motive.

But he could not deny.

After all, here were two eyewitnesses. The facts were undeniable.

"Seriously... What is she thinking? Anyway, I should report to the teachers first..."

"Ah, wait a sec..."

Hisui was just about to dissuade Kirika when a familiar voice interrupted them.

"What are you two doing stuck so close together!?"

The new arrival was standing with one hand on her waist while the other hand pointed at them. Naturally, it was Rushella.

Having finished her morning training, random sweat drops still glistened on her skin. This additional layer of healthy color added to give a different charm from usual.

"In this deserted place, leaning so close together... What are you doing!?"

"N-Nothing much..."

Normally, Kirika would have argued back harshly, but currently, her voice was almost inaudible.

Not only that, she was looking down, fidgeting with her fingers, making furtive glances at Hisui to seek his help.

"Hmph, that Mei aside, all these girls I can't be careless with. Hisui, do you just take anyone who throws herself at you!?"

"A boy of my age will always welcome girls, okay... Anyway, I've got something to ask you..."

Hisui put on a serious expression to ask about an important matter.

But the answer soon came out on its own.

"What's the matter, Draculea-san? Eh, Kujou-kun is here too... You said just now that you had something to do, did you mean making preparations here?"

Reina tilted her head adorably as she asked.

Due to the physical exertion, she was covered in sweat as well, using a towel hanging on her neck to wipe her forehead.

"Class Rep..."

"You came at the right moment!"

Before Hisui could speak, Kirika had already rushed forward to interrogate Reina.

"What is the meaning of this!? Why did you do that!?"

She pointed at the shredded remains of the tent.

However, Reina seemed perplexed.

"Excuse me, Senpai, what did I do...?"

"That's right, what are you accusing her of doing!?"

Rushella stepped forward to shield Reina. Kirika clicked her tongue in annoyance and continued to question with righteous authority.

"Silence, you! Let me hear your reasons first! If the situation turns out to be serious, it must be dealt with strictly..."

"Hold on, Senpai."

Hisui went up and pulled Kirika's hand.

"What!? Didn't you see the culprit's face clearly too!?"

"Yes, I did see. By the way, Rushella, how did practice go with you two?"

Suddenly asked, Rushella did not know how to answer instantly.

But she soon puffed out her voluptuous chest and proudly answered:

"Yes, the baton passing was perfect! You should look forward to my magnificent performance in the real event!"

"That's wonderful. Then Class Rep was teaching you all this time, right?"

"How rude, I was simply accompanying her, okay!?"

Rushella remained arrogant as ever.

Hisui nodded as though figuring out something.

"Hey... What are you asking about? Shouldn't we clear up that matter with her first..."

"Senpai, you saw as well, right? The culprit dressed in uniform just now..."

"Of course... Eh, ah....!"

Only now did Kirika carefully examine Reina from head to foot.

Reina before her eyes... was wearing gym clothes.

No matter how you looked, she had been wearing these clothes and exercised for quite a while.

More importantly, Rushella served as her proof of absence.

On further thought, she was clearly doing morning training on the track far out. Coming here to hide in the storeroom before him was completely impossible.

"...What's going on?"

"I would like to know too."

Hisui and Kirika looked at each other.

Rushella and Reina watched them in bafflement.

"...Why are these two talking weirdly all this time?"

"No idea..."

The four of them were respectively confounded.

Even when class started, they still had not solved the mystery.

"...Consequently, my Supernatural Investigations Club will be responsible for unraveling this mystery!"

After school in the empty classroom that served as their base of operations as usual, the "club president" Rushella was announcing at the lectern.

However, the remaining "members" did not share her enthusiasm and were occupied with their own thoughts.

"No, speaking of which, this is totally none of our concern, right? There are backup tents anyway, it's not like it'll affect the sports festival from being held, right?"

Mei was completely unmotivated.

She had already heard from Hisui roughly what happened during morning practice.

Since Kirika had reported to the teachers, the homeroom teacher had also mentioned during homeroom.

"That's not the issue! My classmate is under suspicions, okay!?"

"Granted that may be... But she has an alibi, right?"

"...Yes."

Sitting on the right side, Hisui nodded.

As for spotting Reina, Hisui and Kirika had withheld that detail from the school.

Since both of them saw her, it was definitely not illusion. But Reina also had absolute unshakable proof of absence.

"Besides, what motive does Class Rep have? A model student who is devoted to morning training, why would she do something that would wreck her everyday efforts in an instant?"

Mei sought agreement from Hisui but Hisui did not nod.

The hardworking and persevering girl could not possibly have done this. He knew very well.

But he felt quite concerned about the gloom on her face when she was selected as the final leg for the relay race.

"No matter what, if this is left alone, the rare sports festival is in danger of being suspended! For the sake of letting the world witness my magnificent running form, the culprit must be apprehended!"

"Such a pain. Besides, isn't it just a prank? As long as there are enough tents, surely the sports festival won't be suspended..."

"Not necessarily. This morning, this was received in the school mailbox."

Sitting to Hisui's left, Kirika spoke gloomily.

She stood up and raised an inconspicuous sheet of A4 paper to show everyone.

Written in blood red cursive script was a concise warning.

Stop the sports festival now. Or else the school will be harmed.

Almost filling up the entire page, the words displayed heavy pressure, instilling terror in the reader.

Although anyone could have written this kind of threatening letter, due to the content, Kirika's expression was very grave.

"If all that happened was this sheet of paper, the school would have treated it as purely a prank, but combined with the tent matter... Just to be safe, the school has contacted the police as well. Currently speaking, the school will increase security to make sure the sports festival is held as planned, but if anything else happens, it could very well be suspended."

"Grrrrr! Unacceptable! The villainous culprit must be caught now and taught a lesson!"

"Probably very soon."

The unexpected voice drew everyone's attention to a corner of the classroom.

The speaker was Eruru, who had been typing away on her computer's keyboard, always distancing herself from all the noise of the other club members.

"This threatening letter is the original, right? Also, the words are written instead of typed, it is most likely the culprit's handwriting."

"Yes, I borrowed it from the staff room."

"May I borrow it for a look?"

Kirika nodded and handed the threatening letter to Eruru.

Eruru compared back and forth between the paper and her screen, tapping rapidly on her keyboard.

"What are you doing?"

Interested, Hisui stared at the screen from behind her. Rushella and the girls also followed over. Everyone gathered around Eruru.

"Simple handwriting examination. Comparing handwriting samples gathered from different people with the writing on this threatening letter, clues can be gathered to some degree. Although it is not enough to serve as evidence, that type of precise result would best require a professional, this method could still serve to guide us to a certain extent."

"Huh... Please stop playing police. Whose handwriting are you comparing with? It's not like you have every possible suspect from school, right? Or maybe you have a hunch already?"

"I am not the one who discovered the clue. It was you and Uno-senpai."

Hisui and Kirika were stunned.

At the same time, Eruru's hands also stopped.

"The comparison matches. Even for amateur eyes, it is unmistakable. This is the person who wrote this threatening letter."

Eruru pointed at the screen while she spoke.

Instead of a person's face, there were enlarged words.

The picture came from someone's handwriting sample and really looked quite similar to the cursive script on the threatening letter.

"Although the script style is different, if the same person wrote it, there will still be many similarities. The sample I gathered came from that person's normal script. If writing maliciously in cursive... It should probably look like this threatening letter's style."

"Stop holding back the answer. What's displayed on the computer is..."

"Sera-san's handwriting. I collected it from the notes she took during morning lessons. It is virtually certain that this threatening letter was written by her hand."

A grave silence followed.

Hisui and Kirika's face were stiff while Mei looked to be in disbelief. Floating on the side casually without any worries, Touko continued to display a pure and innocent yet adorably vacant expression.

Only Rushella firmly denied the analysis results.

"I already said it can't be the class representative! You must be wrong! Besides, she was training together with me all morning!?"

"I did not say that the culprit was the Sera-san who was training together was you."

"Ha!? What nonsense are you talking about!?"

Eruru did not bother with Rushella's overbearing indignation and turned towards Hisui behind her.

"Since you saw her yourself, surely you must have some ideas, right? Or did you recognize the wrong person at the time, or someone went through an elaborate disguise?"

"...Probably not. Senpai and I definitely saw Class Rep herself. And likewise, the one who practiced with Rushella was Class Rep herself too."

"Incomprehensible! What rubbish are you all talking about!?"

"Wait, Kujou-kun, could what we saw be...!"

Kirika exclaimed in surprise.

Hisui nodded and gave the answer.

"Doppelganger, I'm pretty sure of it."

This famous cryptid—No, if anything, the term "phenomenon" would be more apt. Everyone present had heard of it before.

A doppelganger was another self that was completely identical in appearance to the original person.

The same person appearing in different places at the same time.

The alibi provided by Rushella, Hisui and Kirika's eyewitness account, the threatening letter's handwriting, Reina's personality—This phenomenon was the only explanation that could resolve all the contradictory elements of the incident.

"There are several theories on the relationship between doppelgangers and the original. Normally speaking, they are not on good terms with their originals. Death upon mutual encounter, with one person representing good while the other represents evil—In any case, having two selves pop up is truly a troublesome thing."

Eruru closed her computer and shrugged.

It looked like the current matter required her participation in the investigation.

"I understand it more now. In other words, the doppelganger damaged the tent and sent the threatening letter to the school while the other one is Class Rep herself!?"

"Although it is currently unclear which one can be considered the real person... Yes, you are correct."

"Why? Why would the doppelganger do bad things!?"

"Then you will need to ask them yourself. Despite identical appearances, their minds are two separate people. So, Kariya, what now? What can we do?"

Hisui asked for a concrete solution.

But Eruru shook her head coldly.

"Even the Supernatural Investigations Section itself does not have a unified policy towards doppelgangers. In this regard, they are even more troublesome to deal with than vampires. Furthermore, there are still many mysteries related to how doppelgangers come about and the precise details in the phenomena. Theories passed down since antiquity also have numerous variations. The term 'doppelganger' is just an umbrella for a variety of similar phenomena involving 'another self.' Hence, the cases must be approached individually and handled with practicality."

"Neither this nor that, so what on earth should we do? All we can do is wait for the class rep's doppelganger to do bad things?"

Mei grumbled and voiced her opinion.

Just as no one could answer her, a laugh of mockery was heard from the classroom's backdoor.

"My, the amateurs have no choice but to surrender, right?"

Everyone looked back.

It was Rangetsu.

Leaning against the sliding door, arms crossed, she scoffed.

"I heard everything. Ultimately, that's all a half-baked club like yours is capable of. 'Supernatural Investigations Club'... That's the name, right? I can totally understand your wish to copy us, but don't you know it's very annoying if you rush about with no idea what you're doing?"

Rangetsu's words did not disguise her hostility at all.

The members of the club all decided to ignore her.

"Hmm, although it's a troublesome enemy, we can't sit back and ignore. Anyway, let's split up and catch her!"

Hearing Rushella giving orders, the other members nodded and accepted.

"That's right, perhaps we might find something useful in our search."

"I don't mind at all as long as I get to team up with Hi-kun, okay?"

"...After all, I have no wish for the sports festival to be suspended. As the student council vice-president, this is part of my duty."

"In any case, I will check the Supernatural Investigations Section's database to review past cases."

"Let me help as well~"

When Touko raised her hand to sum up, Rangetsu exploded.

Rushing violently into the classroom, she roared:

"Hey! Don't just go ignoring others so readily! Have any of you heard what I said!?"

The five of them plus a ghost distanced themselves from the glaring Rangetsu, huddling in a circle to discuss how to react.

"Hey, that wolf girl is butting in again... She said she had been listening to our discussion, but I totally didn't sense her presence. She's even more like a ghost than Touko-san."

"Don't police have jobs to do...?"

"For the sake of the police's reputation, I must clarify that she is a special exception. Please do not get biased about all the other cops who work seriously in the country."

"...By the way, aren't outsiders forbidden from entering school on principle? Isn't this illegal trespassing?"

"Should we call the police...? Touko-san, without letting her notice, could you quietly use telekinesis to dial a number?"

"Yes, I'll try!"

Listening to Kirika's instructions, Touko focused her mind to unleash paranormal powers. At this moment, Rangetsu barged her way into the middle of their circle.

"Hey what is with you all!? Also, I. AM. THE POLICE! Look, here's my police badge even!"

"Sigh, what the heck... Kariya, could you help show her the way out, she's your colleague, right?"

"Please do not compare me to her. Besides, Oogami-san, why are you here?"

Eruru asked her with clear displeasure.

Rangetsu answered, equally displeased.

"Didn't the school call the police regarding the threatening letter? After all, with so many supernatural creatures in this school, I came over just in case. Furthermore, I have something to report to you all."

"Report...? What is it?"

Rangetsu ignored Eruru's question and picked up the threatening letter from her desk.

She brought it up to her face and sniffed it, then showed an expression of certainty.

"I knew it."

"You smell something?"

"That wording of yours pissed me off. Well whatever, with this I am certain. The true identity of the doppelganger you people talked about, shall I reveal it?"

"Is it related to the confiscated items that had gone missing, what you mentioned last time?"

Hisui figured out what she was about to say and spoke up before her.

Although it was just a half-baked hunch, Rangetsu was clearly shaken in response. Hisui's stab in the dark was apparently right on target.

"H-How did you know...?"

"Oh, you came over on purpose to talk about that, so I was wondering if this time is related as well."

"What were you able to find out from the magic guild where that substance came from?"

Apparently grasping the situation vaguely, Eruru asked calmly.

Everyone else made a look that seemed to say "stop posing around and tell us honestly."

Glared at by six pairs of eyes, Rangetsu confessed reluctantly.

"...Just as you guessed. The effect of that confiscated drug is to artificially produce the doppelganger phenomenon. Without needing someone to drink it, all it takes is a sniff of the gas to take effect. Being too volatile and evaporating too easily is its drawback."

"Wait, you said it artificially produces the doppelganger phenomenon...?"

"Yes. That said, there are all sorts of strange explanations for the doppelganger phenomenon itself. For example, clones, spirit body separation, other selves from different timelines, illusions caused by brain damage. Ultimately, this doppelganger is just their theory."

"I don't need you to write a manual, okay... After breathing in that missing drug, what happens to a person?"

"Part of the person's soul leaves the body, producing the doppelganger. A so-called doppelganger is composed by the spiritual substance called ectoplasm, exhibiting both ghostly and human traits. To a certain extent, it can interfere with solid objects, yet suddenly vanish like a ghost on occasion... A typical doppelganger."

"This typical kind is truly troublesome. Then what is the personality of the produced doppelganger?"

"Normally speaking, everyone suppresses a negative personality under the surface—In other words, everyone possesses an ugly side to them. That personality is materialized and separated from the main body."

"Does that mean that the more proper someone behaves, the more evil the doppelganger...!"

With that, Reina's doppelganger's actions could be easily understood.

As expected... she really did not want to be the final leg for the relay.

But being kindhearted and strictly adherent to rules, Reina hid this at the bottom of her heart.

Then her other self, the one separated from her, acted in accordance with her true wish.

"...How long does that drug last for?"

"No particular time limit. But the main body will gradually grow weak and die. The limit is roughly a week. Once the main body is gone, the doppelganger will also disappear in the end. If you don't want a death, the doppelganger must be found as soon as possible so that they can be merged back into one. But the problem is that the clone won't behave obediently, so who knows what other trouble might arise?"

"..."

Hisui frowned deeply and looked up towards the sky.

Although not to the point of absolute evil... Reina's doppelganger's actions were already a thin line from criminal activity. Even if the Supernatural Investigations Section already grasped the truth of the matter, if the crimes came to light, the main body—Reina herself—would most likely be punished.

Furthermore...

"The lost item still hasn't been found, right?"

"We are still devoting full effort to searching. Although the drug's quantity is small, there is probably still enough to create a number of doppelgangers. To prevent further crimes, of course we will try our best to investigate... Currently, the unresolved issue at hand is the school's incident. So like I said, you few should not interfere."

"That's not wrong... But your side's manpower is limited, right? We're still willing to help out, you know?"

"That's right! Let the Supernatural Investigations Club assist you under my command!"

Rushella stepped forward resolutely.

But Rangetsu scoffed.

"I've not fallen so low as to seek help from a vampire. Let's end the amateurish games here. Why don't you hurry home and lie in your coffin?"

"What did you say!?"

Throwing insults, Rushella and Rangetsu began a dispute.

Hisui frantically intervened to prevent a battle from erupting here.

"What are you doing!? Let me personally censure this ignorant bitch...!"

"Stop it now, none of us are adult yet. Well, although I don't know how old you actually are."

"Why are you talking like that as well!? I shall handle my own school affairs...!"

"Well said... I believe that if you're trying to search inside the school, wouldn't it be more convenient for students to do so?"

Hisui coldly looked at Rangetsu.

"W-What? A-Although I'm not familiar with the interior of the school..."

Hisui deliberately ignored the opening shown by Rangetsu and secretly winked to the other club members.

First to pick up on Hisui's gaze was Mei.

"That's so true~ Police trying to interfere in school would take a lot of work. If I were a detective, I'd recruit collaborators from within first."

"Agreed. A school is essentially a sealed, miniature society. I specifically took on the guise of a student to work more efficiently in this place... It is truly regrettable that someone else from the Supernatural Investigations Section does not understand this principle. Oh well, to each their own, though it is hard for me to agree."

Eruru shrugged as though worrying for her colleague.

"Uh, I didn't say... I'm not seeking help completely..."

Rangetsu began to compromise in a quiet voice.

Naturally, everyone heard her, but no one responded.

"Logically speaking, from the student council's position, I would like to assist even more than the Supernatural Investigations Club... But it cannot be helped. After all, I am the students' representative, helping resolve school problems is only natural. Even seeking help from the police would not be strange... Since they find us a hindrance, it cannot be helped."

Kirika expressed her stance to respect Rangetsu's intentions.

Hearing her flawless speech, Rangetsu's face began to perspire uncomfortably.

"No, umm... It's not like... there's much hindrance... Ah, isn't there something called civic responsibility, right..."

"I am a ghost so I can investigate various places without worrying about danger. But since I'm a hindrance, forget it. Originally, a ghost could be so useful..."

Touko spoke with forlornness.

Indeed, she was not afraid of dangerous tasks.

Because she was already dead.

"...No, umm... I-If you all want to help that much... It's also okay? Treat it as practical experience? What I mean is, go ahead and try? Right, everything is about experience..."

Halfway through, Rangetsu found everyone staring at her with icy cold gazes.

Cough, she cleared her throat and bowed her head deeply.

".........Please help."

"By this point, what are you talking about?"

"How totally lame! After saying all that in the beginning."

"Aren't you embarrassed?"

"The police force's shame."

"I don't wanna be like that when I grow up."

"In her shoes, I'd die from shame. Oh well, I'm dead already, however."

With Touko summing up with black humor, Rangetsu began to scream, almost about to cry.

"What on earth, you're ganging up on me!? I'm already bowing down to you all!"

"Then show us your sincerity."

"Sincerity... What do you mean by that?"

"Stick out your hand."

"...?"

Despite feeling perplexed, Rangetsu presented her palm towards Hisui.

Then a coin fell into her hand.

"...What is the meaning of this?"

"Get me a drink."

"Why are you treating me as an errand girl!?"

Rangetsu angrily threw the coin into the ground.

Her anger was hardly surprising.

"Ah, what the heck! What's wrong with asking you to buy a drink?"

"Don't treat me like a fool! Can't you buy it yourself!?"

"No, but I just think you'll be super fast."

"Well, doing the 100m dash in nine seconds is totally possible... Hey! You're still treating me like a total errand girl!"

Rangetsu howled, so infuriated her shoulders shook.

Hisui picked up the coin with impatience.

"Fine, I'll go myself. Oh, what does everyone else want? I might as well get everything along the way."

Hearing his altruistic suggestion, Rushella stepped forward.

"Hold it, Hisui. It's better if I go buy drinks for you all. As someone of high stature, it is necessary to display generosity from time to time. Allow me to serve as a role model to show you the difference between my race and those werewolves!"

Giggling, Rushella made no effort to hide the mockery in her tone of voice.

Rangetsu gnashed her teeth in response but Rushella pretended not to see.

"Wait. It's just buying drinks, don't talk like everyone owes you. Why don't I go instead? Since it's still daytime, I'm still the strongest until sunset, right? Unlike a certain skinny bones tomboy."

Mei threw Rangetsu a glance and stepped forward.

She proudly puffed out her bountiful bosom, causing Rangetsu's anger to reach new heights.

"Hold on, what is required in this situation is not strength but wealth. I have no wish to make the entire police force or even all the civil servants suffer despise due to a single miser. Allow me to treat everyone and buy the drinks."

Eruru took out a long purse that looked like it was bulging with cash and stepped forward.

She did not even look at Rangetsu.

"Wait up, no matter how much money you have, upon my pride as a senior, how could I allow an underclassman to buy drinks for me? Let me go as an elder. Oh well, although there do exist useless members of society among those who are older."

Kirika looked at Rangetsu with eyes of pity while taking a step forward.

"No no, speaking of age, I should be eldest, right? Let the big sister do this! Using my paranormal powers, I can just shake the vending machine without spending any money! Despite how I may look, at least it's better than someone who contributes nothing, wasting the world's resources, right?"

Touko pointed at Rangetsu, making a strong statement.

Finally, Rangetsu exploded, unable to tolerate anymore.

"...That's going too far!! Fine fine, I'll go buy a few cans of damn juice!!"

In the end, all six members of Hisui's group reached out towards Rangetsu in concert and spoke in perfect unison:

" " " " " "Please go." " " " " "

"Sheesh, what the heck!"

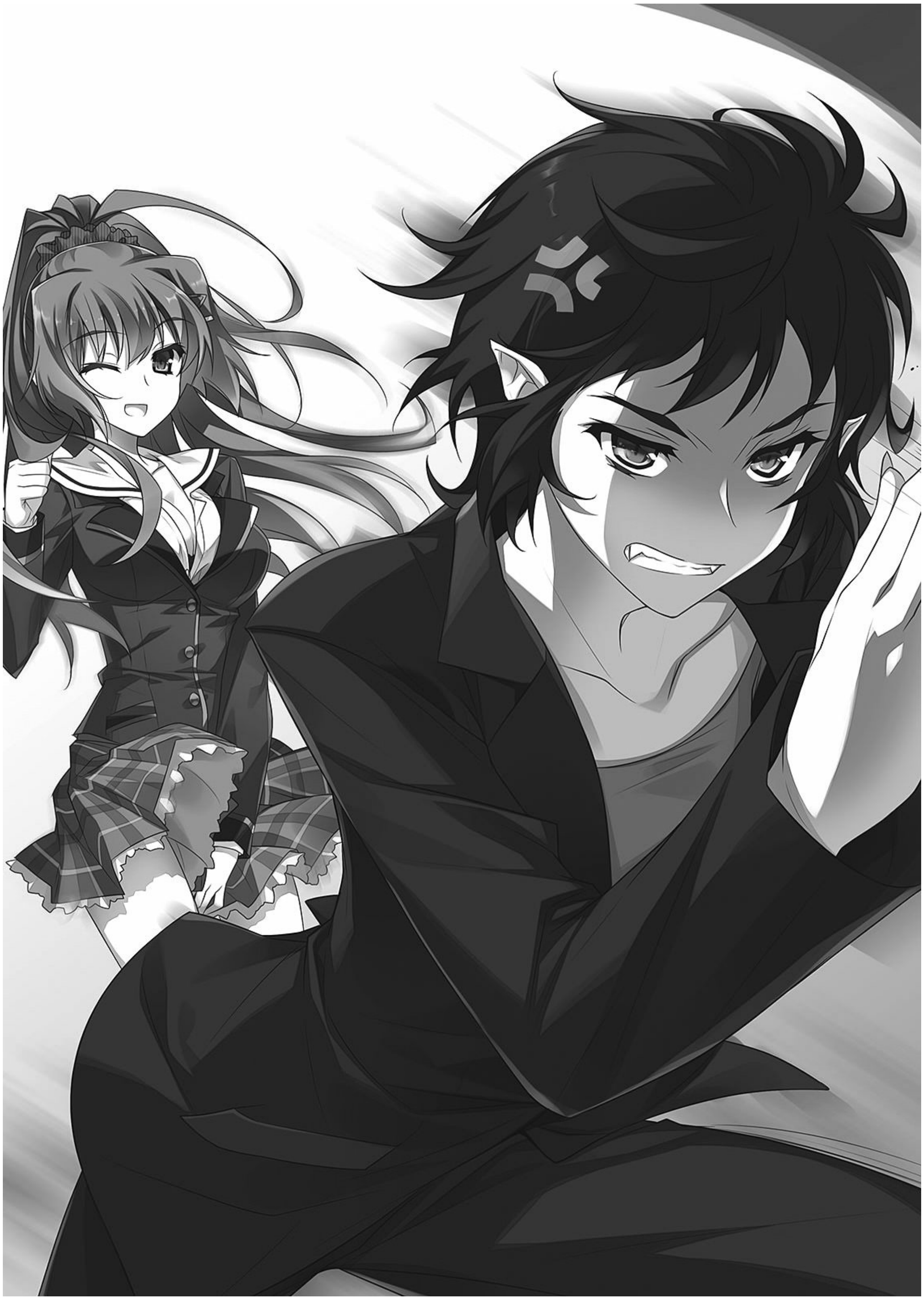
Rangetsu threw the guest indoor sandals to the ground and even stomped on them.

Her anger seemed to have blown a fuse, even she probably was no longer clear on what she was doing.

As Rangetsu rushed into the hallway, entering a startup pose like a sprinter, no, it was virtually like a beast getting ready to accelerate on all fours.

"Don't underestimate a werewolf's speed! I'll get there in the blink of an eye, bringing back the purchases faster than anyone!!"

"Oh, I'd like a mineral water."



"Gimme strawberry milk!"

"I want a soda~"

"Please get me a coffee, no milk or sugar."

"I would like some tea. Hot, not cold please."

"Tea please~"

Even the ghost who did not drink tea placed her order nonchalantly.

But Rangetsu did not notice. After hearing the orders, she sped off down the hallway like a rocket.

A whirlwind was kicked up in the surroundings, causing the girls to hastily hold down their skirts.

The rapid charge almost made one worry for the integrity of the floorboards. Finally, Rangetsu disappeared into the other side of the classroom block.

"..Well then, let us adjourn for today. Everyone, please leave before that person returns. Do not let her discover you. Now that the Supernatural Investigations Section is mobilized, that person's presence is irrelevant."

"Are you a demon?"

Hisui felt that Eruru was going a bit far, but she ignored his remark.

"This will teach her a lesson. After all, she will be back. Allow me to report to everyone the doppelganger's details once I gather information. Perhaps human wave tactics might be required, so please coordinate when the time comes, everyone."

"Okay."

Then the group dispersed.

Roughly one minute later, Rangetsu returned to the deserted classroom. Naturally, the newly bought drinks became the sacrifices for her to vent her anger.

"Crap, I forgot to shop..."

That night, Hisui began to worry while standing in front of his fridge.

Although he had already had dinner with Rushella, the remaining ingredients in the fridge were not enough to make lunch for tomorrow.

For Hisui himself, eating at the cafeteria or buying from the snack shop was fine, but recently, for Rushella's sake, he had been preparing lunchboxes for the two of them.

"Drinks will also be out soon... Need to buy more."

"Yes, you go!"

"Yeah, I am planning to go... What about you?"

"I'm very busy!"

Lying on the sofa in the living room, Rushella was watching a variety show intently.

Normally, when Hisui went out she would always follow along. But apparently, she was prioritizing her entertainment this time. In comparison, the television in front of her was more important.

"...Oh well, that's less of a pain for me."

"Ah, I wanna go to school early tomorrow too! The class rep agreed already! We can't be lazy with the relay race training!"

"Oh... Sure, that's fine. Then go to bed early, okay? Sleep after this show's over, got that?"

"Yes!"

A vampire who slept and rose early without being a night owl—Definitely an endangered species, but it was probably more healthy.

Hence, Hisui changed into jeans, put on a jacket and left the house alone.

Bathed in the chilly autumn air, Hisui made his way towards a nearby twenty-four-hour supermarket.

Not wanting to spend unnecessary time on shopping, he went directly to buy the ingredients he needed for lunch tomorrow and picked up some daily necessities that had run out at home.

After buying these things and leaving the shop, he met someone unexpected.

"Eh, Kujou-kun?"

"Oh it's you, Class Rep..."

Reina was in her school uniform, standing in front of the automatic doors.

"Did you go for cram school? It's so late already, that must be tough."

"Isn't it the same for you, Kujou-kun... You're out shopping this late?"

"The princess wants a packed lunch, so her royal wishes are difficult to oppose."

Hisui smiled wryly. The two of them naturally walked side by side.

"Ah~~ Thank you for this morning, taking the trouble to accompany that girl."

"...? Oh, don't worry, it was nothing at all."

"She's probably quite unused to teamwork events. If only she'd improve a bit."

"...It'll be fine... probably? Looks like she's getting used..."

"Hopefully. Oh Class Rep, I want to ask you something."

"What?"

"Are you really okay... with the relay race?"

Although Hisui was unsure if he should mention the past, he still asked.

Perhaps he was worrying too much.

Or maybe Reina herself did not mind.

In any case, he still decided to ask her.

Due to the doppelganger's threatening letter and the tent incident, Hisui felt that the reasons stemmed from this matter, unable to be dispelled from her heart.

"No problem... It's just running at the end. Just a little bit of pressure, that's all."

"A bit...?"

Despite feeling guilty, Hisui decided to dig to the bottom of the matter.

This word made a shred of gloom flash across Reina's face.

"If you're really unwilling... Rushella would gladly swap, you know?"

"...It's fine. Reluctance cannot be considered an excuse."

"..."

"In middle school, I took part... in a relay race in the final track and field meet, as the final leg. Because my record in the club was the best prior to that... I was assigned that position."

Head bowed, Reina slowly recounted the past.

Hisui silently played the part of a loyal listener.

"But... I made a mistake when receiving the baton, dropping it. In addition, I even fell over... And ended up finishing last."

"..."

"The teammate before me kept blaming herself. But I knew clearly in my mind that it was my fault. I dropped the baton."

"This kind of problem can't be blamed on one side, right? Although as an amateur, I'm not too qualified to comment."

Even knowing that comforting words were futile, Hisui could not bring himself to do nothing.

Reina must have heard these words from others hundreds of times. She was perfectly capable of comforting herself as well.

"...Maybe. Actually, whether first place or last place, I don't really mind... After all, my love for track and field ended with middle school. My parents demanded it. They believe that track and field sports can't last a lifetime, so in order to get into a good university, the three years in high school must be spent studying hard in preparation... So it's fine. I've thrown away my sports gear already... This is actually better, I can concentrate more on studying."

"...But now that you're the final leg in a relay race, you have to stand on the track once more."

"After all, everyone has to participate... It can't be helped. This time, I won't make a mistake..."

Reina's voice grew quieter and quieter, and finally could not be heard.

Mental trauma over something trival in the past had become for her a set of heavy shackles.

Never taken part in any club activities, Hisui probably could not understand that agony, but to her it must be an unerasable wound.

"Even in high school, you can't completely bury yourself in studying and ignore everything else. Ah, but you're already working very hard in your studies, right? Still wearing your uniform so late at night, you went to cram school, right? I think there's a new one recently opened nearby?"

"Yes, right..."

"If you stay up too late, you won't be able to get up tomorrow, you know? Morning basketball practice with Rushella must be tough for you too. Will you be able to get up?"

"No problem. I'm going to bed as soon as I get home."

"Really?"

Hisui stopped walking.

Without noticing, they had reached a deserted alley.

There were very few people out on the streets. This was only natural, born not of conscious intent.

But luck was favoring Hisui.

He did not want anyone to hear the next part of the conversation.

"So... Who the heck are you really?"

The atmosphere changed rapidly.

Reina shifted her gaze away and took a few steps back.

"What are you talking about...? I am..."

"You are Sera Reina, the class representative. Well, that's true indeed, because both of you are real, the real person. However, even though the real Class Rep might be going to cram school this late, unfortunately, there's no cram school nearby. I made it up on purpose. Also, you're training with Rushella for the relay race. So the memories are not shared after splitting into two. That's too easy to discern."

"So you suspected me already..."

Reina—her doppelganger—bowed her head and smiled.

The grin on her lips made her seem like a completely different person from usual.

The girl formed from the dark side of Reina's heart, although her appearance was identical, she was not exactly the same.

"When did you notice...?"

"Since I already know the existence of a doppelganger, how could I believe so easily without confirming which one I'm meeting? So I was skeptical from the start. As soon as I heard you talk about throwing away your sports gear, I decided to set a trap. During morning practice, Class Rep was even wearing cleats. Those couldn't have been bought just for the sake of a mere sports festival, right?"

"...I see. But I was also speaking the truth. The other me, has always been troubled by that last race. Giving up on track and field because of parents, pushed into the final leg position, all these are the truth. If you reject all this, you are also rejecting her, you know?"

"Reject? I never said anything like that."

Hisui asked in puzzlement.

He never intended to treat this person as an enemy.

He could never do that.

After all, she was the great class representative who took great care of Rushella.

"Actually, I'm not too concerned about your wish to suspend the sports festival. Although I don't want to make a big deal of things, I don't want the innocent Class Rep to take the fall either... Honestly, I'm not interested in the sports festival and I'd rather not bother with the relay. If it'll end things peacefully, I'd rather get the sports festival canceled. After all, I don't have parents coming to watch either."

For just an instant, Hisui's eyes were filled with nostalgia.

Indeed, he had no interest in showing off in something like a sports festival to begin with. There was no point to putting in that kind of effort. After all, no one was coming to watch.

"..."

"If you really are Class Rep's dark side, then this is quite apt. If you strip down a layer of skin, aren't all humans the same? However, that would be far too difficult to get along with one another, that's why everyone wears a layer of conscience, morals and rationality as outer clothing to bind themselves. Actually, it must be painful for you like this? Then hurry and go home, return to the main body. Complement each other and reach a perfect medium."

"Don't speak as though you know everything!"

"I don't know everything. That's all the more why the two of you should sit down and talk. After all, you're the same person, right?"

Hisui still acted the same as usual.

Because he was facing Reina.

Faced with this being that could be considered a monster. Seeing his attitude, the other Reina could not help but smile wryly.

"What an interesting person you are."

"People say that from time to time."

"So... This must be why you managed to attract both of me."

"Huh?"

"I was born not only because of mental trauma. It must surely be because of you. Because you sit next to me in class but are always so happy together with Draculea-san. Because you're always acting dumb, unwilling to show your heart, always pretending not to see."

"..."

By the time he realized, Reina was up close in front of him.

The doppelganger with the exact same appearance as her.

No, she was Reina and Reina was her.

Her lips leaned in close.

Reflexively, Hisui evaded with his face.

With a mournful look, the girl asked:

"What kind of person is the real you?"

An acrid scent entered Hisui's nose.

Only then did Hisui noticed that Reina was holding a small bottle in her hand.

The lid was already open, the escaping gas invaded his body through his nostrils.

"You...!"

"Next time... I would like to see the real you."

Consciousness fading, Hisui was having difficulty standing.

Hisui fell over on the spot and could only watch as Reina left.

After fainting for a short while, he finally stood up and stumbled his way back home.

There was a strange feeling.

Like a hole had been opened in his chest.

But he could not understand.

The white mist slowly took on a humanoid shape, standing behind him. Hisui did not notice.

Walking in opposite directions, the two figures separated. After that, the newly born "him" went who knows where.

Chapter 4 - Crimson Cohabitation

Part 1

Surprisingly, Rushella was a morning person.

To begin with, a nocturnal life was more desirable by vampirical biorhythm, but waking up early was not a bad thing in itself.

Though she was simply timid about staying up late and dozing off later during evening class only to be woken up by Hisui. However, waking up in the morning was a refreshing thing.

To be honest, she usually wakes up earlier than Hisui.

And sneaks into his room.

This aspect was as one would expect of a vampire.

The door to Hisui's room was left open. As even if he locked the door, she would just break it. That's why invading his room doesn't take much effort.

Today, once again she woke up before Hisui's alarm clock rang, and tried to wake Hisui up before the clock rang, or rather suck his blood.

Yesterday, she slept before Hisui came back from shopping, it seems he returned back home properly.

As always, his sleeping face under the blanket was peaceful with zero alertness.

"Fufufu, again with the sloppy face, in reality you want to have your blood sucked by me don't you?"

She licked her own lips while murmuring, and leaned on him carefully to not wake him up.

As the crimson lips approaches the nape like always, Hisui opened his eyes within a click.

"What's this? You woke up. Well its fine, just stay still"

"Who (are you)?"

While rubbing his eyes, Hisui tilted his head.

It might be that he was not able to see the face very well in the dark because of the closed curtains, but only two people live in this house.

"What are you day-dreaming about? Did you forget the face of your own master?"

"...Master? What are ya talkin about?"

"So your still half-asleep? Its me, hurry up and wake up!"

Rushella grabbed the collar of Hisui's T-shirt and shook him up.

Hisui blinked, surprised.

With certainty, he should be awake completely, but he still seemed puzzled.

"Seriously, who are you? A thief? A burglar? You have courage, I'll give you that. Well it was fortunate that you came to my room. If it was Miraluka's room, it wouldn't have ended with just being chopped into minced meat. Get lost, before you suffer from any painful consequences."

"What are you saying? Who are you calling a burglar!? Well, since I am staying in this Miraluka's room, I will punish any daring insolent one right away! ....Wait, That is already my room! As if I care about someone who is already dead!!!"

"What are you going on about? Hey, I will seriously call Miraluka and have her beat you up.... She is an absurdly heavy sleeper. If she ever learns that she was woken up because of you, you will have to suffer tremendously."

"Is something going to happen if you call someone who is not even there? There is a limit to how drowsy you can get!?

"Ehh..... not there? Oh, so that's why you came in.... Man, is she strolling around somewhere again? Or rather, who are you? You... are not a burglar right? Ehh.. Why.. Why am I being embraced by such a magnificent beautiful girl? I can't see this exchange completely."

However, upon hearing Hisui's compliment, Rushella smiled broadly.

"Wha.. What's with you? You're rather honest today"

"Well, its because I haven't seen such a beauty except Miraluka. On top of that, what is this... a na... naked white shirt?[1] What's with those breasts?"

Hisui blushed and stared at Rushella's breasts with sparkling eyes.

Usually Rushella would have slapped him across the face at least once, but upon seeing a new reaction, she smiled satisfyingly.

"Ohh.... Does it interest you?"

She elevated her breasts by clamping her arms. As if to provoke him.

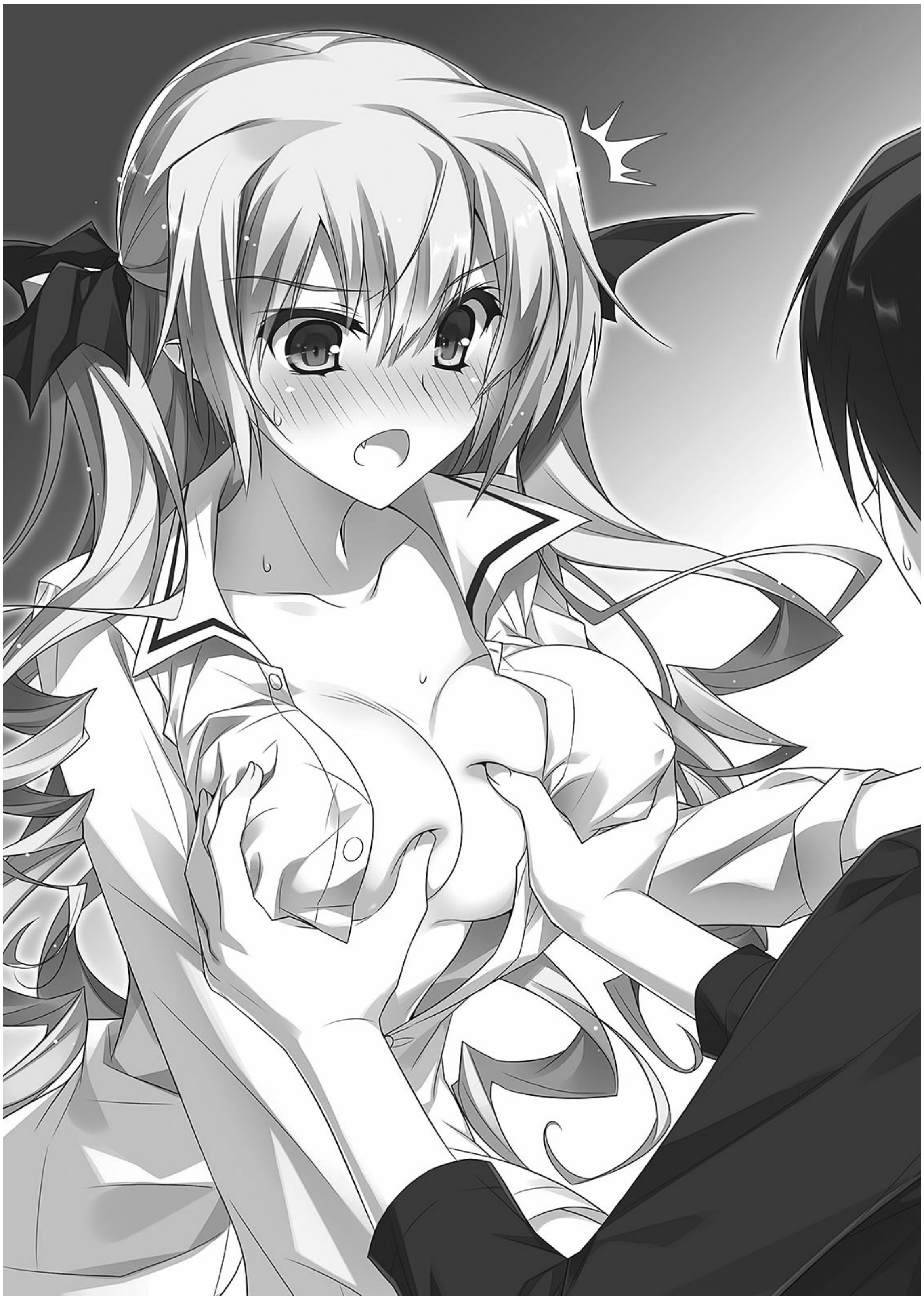
Hisui's face reddened even further, and Rushella was getting immersed in an unspeakable sense of superiority.

"Ehh...... What does this mean? Such a magnificent beauty, in my room..... Ahh, I know, this must be a dream! Hey, hey, even if I am a middle school student, I am letting my lust out too much..... Excellent, do it more!"

"......I knew it, he is still half asleep. Very well, think of this as a dream if you want. Because to you, the time that you spend with me is always like a dream!"

During the out of sync exchange, Rushella nodded as if she was satisfied.

"Dream.....I see, so that's how it is. Well then, such an action... is acceptable too right?"



Hisui's hands timidly extends towards........ Rushella's chest.

Hisui's hand touched the erected breast with a boing.[2]

Just like that....... He buried his fingers in tender flesh.

"Wha!!!"

Within a moment, Rushella's face was dyed red.

However Hisui did't notice that, and continued to stare at Rushella's breasts in amazement.

"Ehh, How could I reproduce..... such a realistic sensation? So I was extremely sexually frustrated."

While carefully rubbing Rushella's breasts, Hisui was letting out his feelings from the bottom of his heart.

One thing after another, he didn't let go, and was trying to proceed to the next phase.

"I...Is this...perhaps that, now.... I can do anything I want?"

"......As if! Move your hand already!!!"

Rushella shouted in a loud voice, and forcefully moved Hisui's hands away from her breasts.

Fortunately the hands were moved away immediately, but with that movement the buttons of her shirt popped out. Revealing the tender white skin in its entirety.

Her chest was not covered by anything, because she was not wearing any undergarments.

Hisui stared at the exposed nipple in wonder.

"DON'T LOOKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKKK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Rushella hid her breasts not by covering Hisui's eyes, but by embracing him.

However, it had the opposite effect in a sense. With surety the graphic sensation was transmitted to Hisui.

"Ah... This in itself is.... Ehh, what, are you tempting me?"

"Silence, shut up!!! Its fine already, without further ado, I'll leave after sucking your blood!!!"

Rushella opened her mouth widely.

Hisui made an impaired expression upon (seeing) the white sparkling fangs.

"That...Impossible, are you a vampire?"

"What are you saying at this point? Just listen up and be silent."

Lips drew near the nape, and the tip of the fangs bit into the skin.

Hisui made a frightful face, until now a yet to be seen expression.

"He..Hey stop....... What are you trying to do?"

"Silence!!"

Just as it was, Rushella thrust her fangs into the nape of Hisui, while pressing him down with great strength.

Hisui's face distorted.

Rather than yelling like always, he was only expressing the look of disgust and fear.

"Stop..."

His tone was weak, and his resistance too, was but little.

Even while feeling unease, Rushella violently continued to drink more than the usual amount with anger imposed in her deed.

Slurp, she detached her mouth from the nape, and as a finishing touch lightly licked the dripping blood with the tip of her tongue.

"Umm, it was delicious as always. Good grief, that's enough of your drowsiness! Come now, wake up already, and start preparing the meal! I have to eat properly, since I have morning training today!"

Rushella arranged her disordered clothes after triumphantly getting out of the bed.

At last her usual tension returned, but Hisui didn't even try to get up.

Just continued to emptily stare at ceiling with a pale face.

"Just for how long, are you going to sleep? You're a rather recalcitrant fellow. Something of this level shouldn't be anything to you."

She looked at Hisui while sniffing.

At that moment, she noticed the abnormality.

………………………………

The wounds on Hisui's neck were not disappearing.

At that soft neck, there were still two marks, gaping wide cavities left there from the fangs.

The complexion didn't return to that face immediately, which was signifying that the amount of blood has not been recovered.

"What does that mean? What the heck happened to you?"

"What..... are you blabbering about? Aren't you the one who sucked it!"

Hisui got up while staggering, and replied in a provocative tone.

On a face that has lost its complexion, strangely only the lips retained the charming crimson.

And the shining fangs sticking out from his lips.

Suddenly increased in length, and of course Rushella knew what it meant.

The one standing before her eyes was an existence, closest to her.

Someone who existed in the gap between vampire and human.

The boy who repelled that curse despite having his blood sucked on many occasions, was now within the fate filled with blood.

Hisui gazed at Rushella who was standing still dumbfounded, with hostility and inquires anew.

"Who the heck are you?"

Part 2

"What's the meaning of this?"

Mei's shout echoed within the class room that was always empty.

Eruru, Kirika, Touko, Rushella and even Hisui was there but, rather than enjoyably relishing their meal, everyone was bewildered at the strange event.

Especially Hisui, who was looking around anxiously as if he did not understand the situation.

"Was this place called Seidou High School? I wasn't really planing on taking the exams, or rather why am I a high school student? Certainly.... My name was called out by the teacher, so I am properly enrolled. My height has grown too but..... Why? One year has passed no matter where I look, be it the newspaper or television.... Seriously what's going on?"

Explain the situation, he appealed with his eyes, but no one was able to explain it to him.

Hisui was strange.

Hisui was the only one out of it.

For the time being he was dragged by Rushella to school

However it seems, he doesn't remember being enrolled in this school, because he was frequently tilting his head in confusion.

But he was somehow able to make it though the morning class, even though it seemed like he had no idea about the content, he was not even trying to take notes.

Naturally he does not remember anyone, including Rushella. Even when he was greeted, he just tilted his head in confusion and asked (Who are you?)

The abnormality, obvious even by the eyes of an outsider, the scar on the neck hidden by the bandage became the deciding factor, and in the afternoon break, he was brought to the empty classroom.

"He became a vampire, on top of having no memories? Hey, what are you doing?"

Rushella only hung her head down in shame, upon being questioned by Mei.

Although she answered several questions asked by Eruru, she was still just like that from the morning, and had not even engaged in the conversations properly.

"What could be the problem? It would still be understandable if he had only lost his memories, but to have even his constitution change."

Kirika frowned with a serious face.

The neighboring Touko was also in deep thought, while drifting in air.

The instant that he met her, he made a scream upon confirming her form for the first time.

While every one was in deep thought, Eruru who was straightforwardly questioning Hisui and Rushella, spoke.

She drew the girls near and started to theorize, in a way that Hisui would not be able to hear it.

"I think that drug which causes the doppelganger phenomenon is involved here. Since then, I researched various cases and even looked into the manufacturer, the Magic Association, but it seems something like this can happen too."

".....Which means?"

On Kirika's question, Eruru spoke in a grave manner.

"In the doppelganger phenomenon, one is split in two rather than being duplicated, that kind of reference is more appropriate. In other words, last nigh after Kujou-kun.... parted with herRushella and went shopping, he met with an accident. Was it an accidental incident, or a planned attack..... Leaving that aside, one more of him was split and born from his own self."

"In other words, the other Hi-kun took the memories of this past year and,"

"Split, and took his constitution too. In short, the Kujou-kun here is a normal human being with the mind and memories of his third year of middle school. Though right now he is someone on the verge (of becoming a vampire)."

Eruru affirmed the words of Mei, and glared at Rushella.

She was biting her lips, her head still hanging down in regret.

"Eruru-chan quick question"

"What is it, Touko-san? And, asking a question is fine, but please stop slipping through my body."

"Iya, it kinda became a habit. Well.. Is the Hisui-kun here the real one? You know, if it's a doppelganger, it happens often right, in reality the real one and the clone switch places kind of thing! Well, they both might be real but........Ehh, then who's the fake? Huh, huh ehh?"

The ghost who had stepped into the puzzling road of philosophy, started to wander around with a "?" mark across her face.

"That was a very good way to look at this. Certainly, he was split, so that's why both of them can be called real. The line between the real one and the fake is simply within the personalities that appeared, which one is the usual Kujou-san, who we know......... It's just a problem of that degree. However, the only thing that confiscated drug caused was a doppelganger with a half-self.... As expected, there is a difference between the "original" and the "clone". The Kujou-san here is without a doubt the "original" with a complete body, there is no mistake in that."

"....I see. So, How can Hi-kun return to being normal again? Do we just have to find this divided clone?"

Mei inquired with a serious face.

Although everyone was worried about Hisui's well being, but she was specially not looking good.

"That's how it will be. Theoretically, the clone's range of operation should be restricted to original's immediate vicinity, around school grounds level maybe. But it wont go that easily."

Eruru frowned, looking at Hisui who was sitting in a separate place.

Within all kinds of stories related to Doppelganger, there are very few that end without a tragedy.

The other self, the embodiment of the hidden evil side, was generally not a friendly existence to the original self.

"Even if we search, he may be hiding himself intentionally. As you would expect from half-self, he will be quite hard to catch. He may be easier to find for someone like Touko-san."

"I see..... Then, I will try searching too! For what it's worth, should I go out of the school grounds? Kirika-chan, release the seal!"

"I will not. It will take lot of time, and if you make a mistake, it will develop into an even bigger uproar."

Kirika refused firmly.

It was simply cruel for Touko who had continuously brought about troubling rumors recently within the school grounds. Though fundamentally she was a good person.

"However, just losing the confiscated item seems to have developed into a serious matter. As predicted, someone took advantage of the ruckus and snatched it......?"

While Eruru was contemplating, Hisui who was watching until now, had started to approach nervously.

Even though his body was that of a High school freshman, his mind was still that of a third year student of middle school, just as one would expect with memory loss, his behavior was unusually formal.

"Umm......... In the first place, what's my relationship with everyone......? Or rather why am I acquainted with such beauties ......? What, did my popular breakthrough occur before I knew it?"

"You sure are carefree. As I thought, it seems fundamentally, you have not changed. Listen to me carefully, you're now--"

When Eruru sighed and tried to reproach him, Mei barged in and entangled her arm with Hisui's while pressing her breasts (against his arm).

"Oh yeah, by the way I'm the girlfriend, we started going out at the same time of enrollment into the high school."

"Eh, for real!?"

"To add, we have already progressed till B, and even further then........."

"Ehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!?"

Hisui faltered.

It was ill natured , since a part of it was true.

"He..Hey wait a second! Li.. its a lie Kujou-kun........ You're going out with me!"

Kirika entangled her arm with the opposite one from Mei's.

She rebuked Mei, but she did the same thing herself.

"Eh, what, what does it mean..... Two timing?"

"Tha.. that's wrong! Since the other day, you even came to my house! And in my room...."

"Eh, what.... what happened in the room!?"

He demanded, inquired for an answer, but Kirika face just reddened, and did not reply.

The crowd, did not deny, since it was true.

"Just what is happening to my high school life...... I believed, I've been living a pretty normal life without causing any special waves.......?"

"Ah, to tell you the truth, you're going out with me?"

Taking advantage of the situation, Touko joined too.

She hugged him from behind, and wrapped her arms around Hisui's neck, who had both of his arms stolen.

"Ehhiiiiiiiiii!? I, even laid my hands on a dead person......?"

"Ah, that way of speaking hurts my feelings! In love things like the gap of life and death should be fine, shouldn't it. I want to love, even if I am ghost!" [3]

"First of all, please rest in peace."

Eruru cut her off indifferently.

Eruru took her eyes off of Hisui, who had his hands full with two people plus one ghost, and looked at Rushella who did not try to break into the conversation.

In this kind of situation, she would usually charge in and cling to Hisui, while scattering the other women, but she just hung her head in shame.

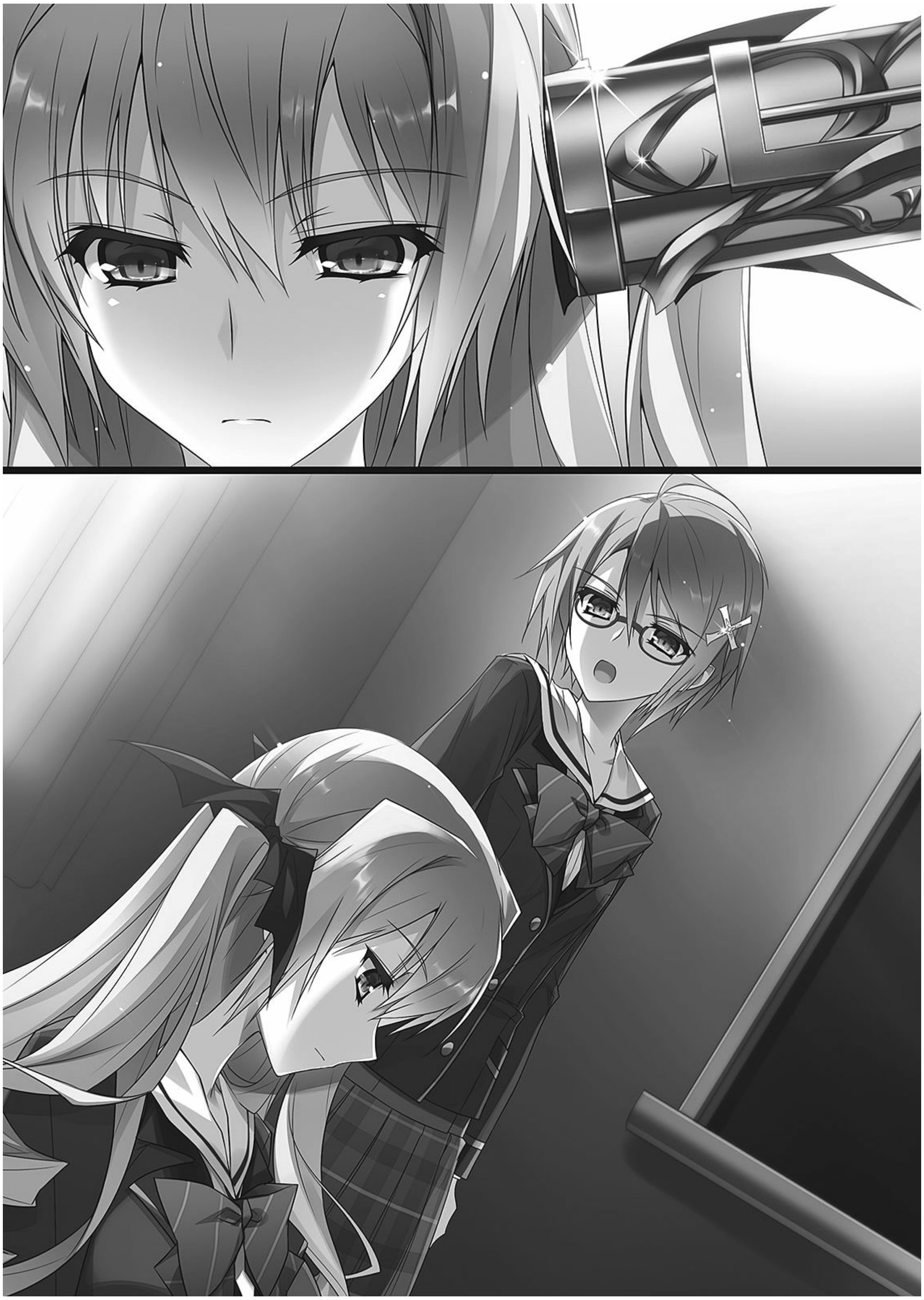
"The urgent matter here should be Kujou-kun's body...... But I wonder what happened?"

Eruru twisted her lips, after she took a glance at the scar made by fangs on Hisui's neck.

It was being hidden by bandages but still having that detestable scar near itself, did not fit well with her.

"As I anticipated, should we take the most effective way of dealing with this?"

In an instant, Eruru got close to Rushella and thrust the muzzle of the sacred argentum gun to Rushella's forehead.



A speedy technique that could not be captured by the eyes...... It should have been that, but it was not like with Rushella's reflexes she couldn't have dodged that.

But, she just bit her lips, and did not try to move.

Even if she was a vampire, if a silver bullet was shot at point black range and blew her brains out, she would certainly perish.

"Just ....!"

Wait, Kirika tried to continue, but kept her silence after she took a look at Eruru.

The Eruru now was filled with murderous intent, that is she wouldn't allow anyone's to object.

"Even if Kujou-san's doppelganger was found, and managed to successfully fuse with him......... There is no guarantee that body will return to how it was before, since it was abnormal until now. A constitution that could easily absolutely nullify vampirization, perhaps I had gotten overly familiar with that kind of thing, which was even more vague than an illusion."

".................."

Rushella did not move, merely made a small clenched fist, and was just firmly clenching it tightly.

"I had warned you, the reason your actions weren't restricted was just because there have not been any victims, but now we have a victim here, who had his blood sucked by you and put his leg into the destiny of the cursed tribe. Have you made up your resolve?"

Eruru put her little finger onto the trigger.

And, if she put just a little more strength into it, Rushella's brains would blow inside out.

Even if it was afternoon, nonetheless, if it was a vampire, he/she would probably be able to dodge a bullet in its initial velocity.

However, Eruru would move taking all that into consideration.

Rushella already lost the moment she had gun point pinned to her forehead.

And nobody tried to stop it.

Just as Eruru had mentioned, the most effective remedy for Hisui's body now, which was put in an unprecedented state, was the method which had been passed down since ancient times, the only and absolute method, which was to destroy the vampire that sucked the (victim's) blood.

"Stop it"

Hisui moved.

After he forcefully freed himself from Mei and the others, he grabbed the barrel of argentum.

"What are you trying to do? Even if you have forgotten about this past year, you surely have not forgotten the knowledge regarding vampires too, have you? Then you should comprehend, just what kind of situation you have been put into?"

Eruru coldly stated.

In a certain sense, she was the one who was most disturbed by the current situation.

"Well, it's just as you said, but it's not like I want stop being human. It's only, shouldn't that be the last resort? We start from finding this clone of mine. If that does not work......"

"If that does not work?"

"I will think about it at that time"

Hisui optimistically answered while looking at Rushella who still had her head hung low.

Eruru shrugged, and lowered the gun.

".....As I thought, you have not changed. Well it's fine, for a short while continue on with that body, and face your own foolishness."

".... No"

Rushella finally raised her voice.

Clenching her fist, she stated with a compelling tone.

"As I thought.... This is some kind of mistake!! Even until now, wasn't he just fine the whole time!! Even when he was sucked by other vampires, he was completely fine.....Even my mystic eyes didn't work at all. As if that kind of guy would become my blood relative with utter ease!!!"

Those words, they could be taken as trust.

Mei, Kirika, and Touko looked at each other with an inexpressible expression.

Since Hisui clearly became a vampire, Rushella's words could easily be put off as a bluff.

However, Rushella had an grim expression, and like her, she won't let out the words to deny the trust (they had) in Hisui.

Only her, Eruru alone spoke with coolness.

"Then, try to test him. Did he really sink into becoming your slave or not?"

"What do......you want me to do?"

"A very simple thing. Please command him. A command that he will absolutely not follow normally. He who is your servant now, after becoming a vampire by having his blood sucked. He should obey your orders. Of course, with his willpower and extent of his progress as a vampire, resistances is possible to certain degree, but he should not be able to oppose if we include your, a {Shinso} mystic eyes. So how about testing it out."

Eruru conveyed with a provocative tone.

Rushella'a stiffened face eventually changes, and with it her tone returns to the normal arrogant one.

"Have it your way. If he was a man that will become a slave that easily, then I won't face anymore trouble too. Hey Hisui, come here. Kneel beneath me, and lick my feet!"

Rushella conveyed pridefully while she sat on the desk and crossed her long legs.

She lit the crimson light in her pupil. Even though she said it in a completely commanding tone, but from the start she didn't believe Hisui would just obey.

It will just end with "Who would do that" comeback. Yes, Rushella did not doubt that.

Excluding Eruru, other girls were hoping for that too.

Even so..

Hisui easily kneeled with hollow pupils.

He indubitably looked up at Rushella who sitting in a high place, as if he was looking at his master. With his tongue he started to move towards those legs...

"St... Stop it!!"

Rushella restrained him, and clattered her legs. With that vigorous momentum, Hisui's was kicked, and he unsightly fell backwards.

"It hurts........... Huh, what was I doing?"

Hisui, after regaining his sanity, blinked in surprise while caressing the area around his nose.

He noticed Rushella hugging herself while trembling continuously, but did not understand the reason entirely. Same with Mei, and the others who were looking at him with speechless faces.

"With this its all clear. The present Kujou-kun is a victim of a complete vampire. I will take him into my custody."

Just like that, Eruru took Hisui by his hand, and lead him outside the classroom.

For an instant, Rushella extended her hand, but gave up immediately, and lowered her hand powerlessly.

"Hey Eruru-chan, where are you going!?"

"For now I will take him to my home. It will become troublesome even if I explain the situation to the Supernatural Investigations Section, having said that, it just won't do if I just neglect this. Either way, as he is now, he won't be able to keep up with high school classes, and for me it wasn't necessary in the first place. I am leaving early, well then."

Eruru dragged Hisui just like that towards the staff room after answering Mei's question indifferently.

Strongly even though she had small stature, Hisui was not able to oppose.

"Or rather, who are you? I thought others, well excluding Ghost-san, that everyone were high school students, but why is a middle school student? Or perhaps for worse even elementary school student geboh"

Before he could say it, Hisui was hit with a powerful body-blow, and was dragged along while he had cuff coming out from his mouth.

The remaining three excluding Rushella, looked at each other, started to plan what to do from here on.

"What do we do?"

Upon Kirika's inquiry, Mei murmured while looking at Rushella.

"For the time being..... I will take over."

Part 3

"...Why are you here?"

That night, two people sat opposite each other at the dining table.

Rushella and Mei.

Hisui and Eruru had left. After school, Mei and Rushella returned to Hisui's home together.

Along the way, the two girls remained silent. After getting there, Mei had gone to the kitchen to prepare dinner. Currently, beef steak, cooked vegetables, salad and consomme soup were on the table.

Of course, the food had portions for two.

"Hi-kun's not here so it's not like I want to be here. I am here to keep you under surveillance. You have to understand your current position. Now that you've sucked someone's blood and made him turn into a vampire, using human terms, you are a criminal. I have to watch you so that you don't go to jail or get into more trouble. Hurry up and thank me."

"Like anyone would..."

Rushella turned her face to the side, sulking.

Mei started to eat without saying anything.

"Hurry and eat, don't waste the food I made, okay? My cooking skills were meant to perform in front of Hi-kun, but I never expected you to enjoy them first."

"It's not like I asked you."

Despite not backing down verbally, Rushella still started to eat.

But as soon as she put a piece of meat in her mouth, she frowned.

"...This is overcooked. The meat has no juice left!"

"Shut up. I eat it how I like it."

"The salad's nothing special either. Hisui's is better."

"And whose fault is it that you can't eat that tasty cooking right now?"

Struck in a sore spot, Rushella shut up.

Mei pressed the advantage.

"...Say, you didn't notice anything unusual about Hi-kun when sucking his blood?"

"...Shut up."

"Why exactly do you stay with him, have you never thought about that? Hi-kun's constitution doesn't mean that he will be immune to vampirization forever, right? Even if this time it turns out fine, perhaps one day it will come to an end. This time is okay, he is still turning, but if you didn't notice soon enough, he could have turned completely into a vampire with no chance to go back. Ah, perhaps that might be better for you... Isn't that your goal all along?"

Mei stared at Rushella and asked.

Indeed, she used to keep mentioning this catchphrase.

"I'll make you mine!"

And right now, Hisui was officially Rushella's possession.

If Rushella wanted, they could share senses even when separated far away.

She could even call him using thoughts.

But Rushella did not do that.

Rather than unable, she chose not to do it.

"I don't want..."

"Don't want what?"

"I don't want things to be like now... I don't want this kind of Hisui..."

Rushella whispered in loneliness.

Seeing her act quite far from her usual conceit, Mei did not press further.

"Pay more attention before drinking blood. I guess Hi-kun really should live in my house after all?"

"That guy is in the middle of vampirization, you know? You, umm... want to make babies with a human, right? Right now... No, even back then, he's not an ordinary human no matter how you look at it. Even so... You're still willing?"

Rushella went on a counter offensive.

Mei was also struck in a sore spot and pouted unhappily.

"Well... That's true. Although he keeps calling himself nothing more than a high schooler, that's clearly impossible."

"...In that case."

"However... In my heart, that doesn't really matter although I'm quite surprised too. But... Isn't this true love? Without reason, following no rules, going against logic... This feeling of wanting his babies❤ in spite of everything?"

"...Hmph."

Rushella scoffed unhappily, scowled and continued to eat her food.

Meat was supposed to be her favorite and the taste did not seem bad. Even greatly displeased, she still shoved food into her mouth.

"Hey, I've got a lame question."

"What?"

"Since vampires have no concept of starvation from lack of food, you don't really need to eat, right? Why are you wolfing things down?"

"The body wants..."

"Yeah, I've heard a theory before, like so-called phantom limbs hurting. When a human turns into a vampire, the brain retains the feeling of 'hunger' from its time as a human, so the body wants it even if it doesn't need food... But you're a True Ancestor, right? That feeling shouldn't exist in the first place?"

"...W-What's wrong with this? Besides, that parent of Hisui's also eats and Hisui says she's very particular about food!"

"Well, since she's lived for so long, surely she tasted human food before and it became a kind of habit? But... what about you? How long have you lived? Or, how old are you?"

"No idea... If I did, it wouldn't be so tough for me."

Rushella's memory of the past was still a total blank.

She had appetite.

And was picky.

But speaking of flavors she missed, her past favorites--she could not recall any.

If anything--She liked everything Hisui made.

"What a girl who's hard to serve."

"You're noisy, shut up! Stop talking about this unimportant stuff... How's Hisui?"

Rushella was more concerned about this most important issue.

The originally sort of harmonious dining table atmosphere instantly grew much heavier.

"You should know better yourself, right? Curing vampirization means destroying you... Or finding Hi-kun's doppelganger to merge them. Is there a third solution?"

"But what if finding that guy's doppelganger doesn't recover it...?"

"Then Eruru-chan doesn't need to take the trouble. I'll personally put a stake through your heart when the time comes. Don't worry."

Mei boldly claimed the last piece of meat with her fork.

The flying meat juices seemed to predict a battle between them as the worst outcome.

"Just you try."

"I won't show mercy."

Sparks flew from their gazes as smiles emerged from the corners of their lips.

Vampire and artificial human, formidable contenders for the throne of the strongest monster--Who shall be the victor, one day it will be decided.

"Say... Umm, Hisui's doppelganger, that guy..."

"If you want to search, you need permission from Eruru-chan first. But Hisui's over with her, so it's better to leave things to them. Do you have any ideas on where Hi-kun frequents? For the last year would be best."

"I only met him in April, you know? I don't know anything about before that... He usually just goes to school and comes home, shopping as well..."

"To accommodate your lifestyle, his circle of activity has shrunk all at once. Oh well, let's try searching this house first. The basement is very spacious, right? He could be hidden there."

"...Maybe. But there's the Tzara Blade down there, I don't really want to go..."

"Then I'll go. You search some other place."

"Don't order me around!"

Despite retorting, Rushella still followed the suggestion and began searching the house seriously.

Mei went to the basement to look for the other Hisui... Naturally, the search turned up nothing.

"That sword... Where did it go?"

A room resembling a study in layout, a vast library, storeroom, wine racks, searching the basement thoroughly, she did not see the cross-shaped sacred sword, the Tzara Blade that Hisui took out occasionally.

A careful examination of the floor showed signs of where the Tzara Blade was originally embedded but it was empty now.

That sword could not be found anywhere.

"Taken away... Who did it? It must be Hi-kun, right...?"

The answer could not be known, Mei's only choice was to leave the basement.

It was late at night, so she headed over to Hisui's room.

Although he was not around, since she was already at his house, of course sleeping in his room was the right thing to do.

"To welcome Hi-kun's return any time, I have to mark his bed with my fragrance❤"

...Making up this sort of reason, Mei put on the highly revealing babydoll she had worn before and jumped on Hisui's bed.

But greeting her was not the sensation of the mattress springs but a soft yet elastic body and bosom.

Yes, Rushella.

Rushella still kept her habit of wearing Hisui's uniform shirt and had taken the bed first, giving off steady breathing noises.

"...Why are you here!?"

Mei grabbed her collar and shook Rushella forcefully.

Woken up, Rushella rubbed her eyes in annoyed anger.

"So noisy, shut up!! Where I sleep is my freedom!"

"Go sleep in your own room! Or perhaps you're seeking his warmth in his bed since he's not home!? Why do I find this situation so familiar!?"

"So noisy, once you're here, I can't smell that guy's scent anymore! Scram!"

"I'm the one who wants to blame you! Hand over Hi-kun's pillow right now!!"

"Like anyone would give it to you!"

Rushella buried her face into the pillow and began to rub it as though showing off.

Then shoving the pillow in her bosom, she swore to defend it to the point of death.

"A battle of superiority here after all...? Hi-kun's bed is mine!!"

"Shut up, it's mine!!"

The battle for the title of the strongest monster began for this super stupid reason.

Finally, striking each other simultaneously, the two girls rolled off the bed onto the floor, falling asleep on the cold wooden floor. That happened an hour after the battle started.

"...I feel a chill down my spine, like some disaster is going on behind my back in my domain."

Hisui grumbled while lying on the sofa.

Despite sleeping on high class stuff, it was someone else's home after all and it felt unfamiliar.

Unfamiliar ceiling, furniture, air, even that unfamiliar stranger--She was taking a bath.

After skipping afternoon lessons, Hisui was first taken to Seidou Hospital.

Then going through vampire tests, there was a detailed examination of his vampirization rate. He heard that he had received this kind of testing before, but he had no memory of it.

Due to Rushella sucking too much blood at once, compared to one instance of blood feeding, the vampirization was quite severe. Reportedly, his blood loss had reached 60% of full vampirization.

"So that means I'm closer to the vampire side now, huh."

Hisui touched his lengthened fangs and sighed.

These series of questions left him scratching his head.

Along the way, he had asked that Eruru girl about the situation.

To be honest, a lot of it was totally incomprehensible and difficult to believe.

But she did not look like she was lying and the one year blank in his memories was real.

Whether newspapers or television, everything proved the passage of time. Only he was out of touch with the times.

It looked like what those girls said about another him was true.

But just the fact of his constitution was incomprehensible.

Despite his unusual upbringing, a constitution immune to vampirization was unheard of.

No wait.

Miraluka seemed to have mentioned it.

The key to unraveling the link between humans and vampires.

One of the theories exhibiting the possibility of coexistence.

"No good, I still can't recall it... I remember her talking about something after drinking too much red wine..."

The foster parent who had raised him, more than a thousand years old, occasionally murmured incomprehensible things filled with philosophical flavor.

That itself was fine, but the worst thing was that every time she got totally drunk, she ended up hugging him.

Despite such a slender body, those breasts pressing against him were unreasonably massive... Plus the ear-biting attacks, it was too stimulating for a boy in puberty.

Rumor had it that getting blood sucked by a vampire was accompanied by arousal and pleasure, that could very well be true.

Although getting his blood sucked this morning was super painful.

Really painful like dying.

Apart from that... Truly so beautiful.

Those lips touching his neck, the tongue licking every drop of his blood, all was beautiful to the point of suffocation.

However, when that girl found out he was turning into a vampire, her face went pale as though she saw the end of the world.

Why?

Clearly she was a vampire.

"I really don't get it..."

Hisui muttered blankly, stood up and checked out his surroundings.

After the hospital examination, Eruru took him to her house.

It looked quite a classy high rise apartment and she lived alone.

Just as he was hesitating at the door, wonder if it was appropriate to enter, a kick to the shin sent him inside.

"Am I always treated like this?"

It seemed like he was particularly popular with girls since high school, this unsettled Hisui.

Speaking of which, how did he get to know this person?

With such questions, Hisui looked at the spacious living room.

Earlier, she said feel free to drink anything from the fridge.

He wanted to just grab something to quench his thirst but when Hisui saw the other fridge, he could not help feeling curious.

The other fridge was only half the size of a personal fridge and looked like those simple ones in hotels.

Living alone, a single fridge was more than enough. However, Hisui did not find this fridge out of place.

Because it was the same in his home.

There was the normal fridge for his and Miraluka's food.

Beside it was another small fridge.

That was exclusive to Miraluka, he had never opened it before.

Rather, Miraluka forbade him from opening it.

If this fridge here was the same, contained inside was--

"Are you thirsty?"

Just as his hand touched the handle, Eruru appeared in the living room after her bath.

She was still using the bath towel to dry off the beads of water dripping from her hair.

Eruru was dressed in cute pajamas of pure white, decorated with abundant frills like her casual clothing. For some reason, her tone of voice was so cold.

"This fridge does not have anything for you to drink. Please open the adjacent one. There should be mineral water and milk."

"Isn't this one more suited to the way I am now?"

Hisui pointed at the small fridge.

Eruru turned her face away, basically saying yes.

With that, Hisui was certain of the fridge's contents.

"Inside this fridge... It's blood, right? Blood packs."

"..."

"Because my parent did that before. She has meals normally as well but the main staple sustaining her life is this. But she never allowed me to see her drinking blood and forbade me from opening that fridge. Actually I don't really mind. What's so strange about vampires drinking blood. But you..."

"I am a dhampir."

Eruru confessed without looking at Hisui's eyes.

For Hisui in his amnesia, this was her first time revealing her identity.

But Hisui did not seem to panic.

"I see... That's why you understand vampires so much."

"This has nothing to do with parents. It is the result of my own learning. Also, it is totally your fault that I keep blood packs for backup...."

"Huh?"

"Y-You were the one who told me to stop taking those drugs for suppressing the urge to drink blood, that is why I...!"

Unbelievably, Eruru actually lost composure and started to explain.

Naturally, the current Hisui did not remember what he had said.

He simply scratched his head and imagined what he felt at the time.

"...I said something like that huh. But yeah, dhampirs are like vampires, there's a limit to endurance, so drinking in moderation is better..."

"I know that! Otherwise, sanity cannot be maintained. Truly tragic. Say... Are you actually thirsting for blood?"

Eruru leaned over and asked, clearly without displeasure, apparently worried about Hisui's body for real.

Dhampirs inherited dual traits from vampires and humans. In this sense, they were quite similar to victims of vampires.

Just as a dhampir craved blood, vampire victims also thirsted for fresh blood as though trying to refill the blood that had been sucked away from them.

"No... Not really. I can still bear it. On the other hand, I'm a bit thirsty."

"...Very well. Tell me if you cannot bear it. I will send you to the hospital for a transfusion.

"..."

In principle, blood should be taken orally as a vampire's food, transfusion had little meaning in this sense.

But for a victim in the process of vampirization, it was still possible to suppress the urge to suck blood as a method for replenishing lost blood, hence it was an effective type of treatment.

Even if losing rationality from severe vampirization, transfusions could produce an alleviating effect to some degree to maintain sanity.

"But... Isn't drinking blood less of a hassle?"

"You want to choose such a horrifying solution?"

"Who knows."

Hisui took out a bottle of mineral water from the normal fridge and sat on the sofa.

Drinking a bit of water, he spoke slowly.

"When I was small, I fell over in front of my parent. My knee was scraped and it bled."

"..."

"There was a lot of blood and it was very painful. I ran to her, crying. Then.. She licked her lips."

"Very normal. A vampire after all."

For a vampire, blood was the desire prioritized above all thought.

Even with a young child holding the injury and crying, as long as there was blood, in the first instant, their eyes would ignore all else.

Instinctively, she wanted to suck blood.

No vampire could escape this fate.

"...Right, as a vampire it's perfectly natural. But when she noticed me looking at her, her face went pale all at once. She held her breath and turned her gaze away from the wound, bandage it frantically. It was my first time seeing her in a panic."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Nothing much... Her look that time was very similar to Rushella's expression. When Rushella sucked my blood and discovered I was turning into a vampire."

"Since she regrets it, why not avoid sucking blood in the first place? If self-control does not work... Then she should not live with humans."

"Maybe. But Miraluka also never did anything to me... I really don't mind. Although I didn't mind in my heart... I never told her. Of course, I never mentioned that incident after the fact."

Hisui recalled his parent back then.

After his wound was bandaged, he still could not speak out.

Towards the vampire side his parent displayed--He must have felt fear back then.

Then afterwards, all along... all along, he failed to tell her.

Then what about himself during that blank period?

Himself for the past year?

Did he say it out?

"Say... Where's my parent, do you know?"

"..."

Eruru was unable to answer.

She tried to be an expressionless listener throughout the entire process but no matter how she feigned calmness, her wavering face could not be controlled.

"I looked at the house before going to school today. Her room feels like it's changed, but there's no note. She used to leave notes for me when leaving the house and there's no record in my cellphone either. The calls and text messages are all from you girls. What exactly... happened to her?"

Hisui stared straight at Eruru. She was at a loss for words.

To be honest, the current Hisui was in an unstable state. Eruru was very hesitant on revealing the bad news to him.

But Hisui was surely going to find out the truth on his own soon.

Redundant fake kindness might hurt him even more.

"I heard she passed away. You told me."

"...I see."

Unexpectedly, Hisui's answer was very calm.

He neither broke down crying nor was angry, simply accepting the truth indifferently.

"Are you not curious? Her death and the whole story... Although I know very little. Or do you remember vaguely?"

"No, no impression at all. I also feel that I'm supposed to be very depressed... I didn't expect to be this calm. What happened over the past year?"

"I only met you in April. If anything huge happened, there was only your meeting a vampire."

"...How unlucky am I exactly?"

Hisui smiled in self-mockery, lying back on the sofa.

Eruru did not ask about his past anymore and switched to more practical issues.

"To avoid speeding up the vampirization, please do not make contact with Rushella-san. If she visits you, do not let her in."

"...What if she breaks the door down?"

"I will shoot."

"Okay, I won't see her."

"On our side, we will also track down your doppelganger. Please do not... take action alone. Right now, you are totally an ordinary human."

"I know."

Hisui muttered and closed his eyes.

Probably due to the sun's rays, he felt no strength in his limbs.

Combined with the symptoms of vampirization--his anemic body was also causing him suffering.

Sighing, Hisui drifted off to sleep.

Eruru covered him with a blanket but Hisui was unaware, having fallen in to deep slumber.

"...Is that okay?"

Reina was standing in a dark alley that looked like a gangster hangout.

More accurately, it was the other Reina--Her doppelganger.

The girl's main body had returned home already, most likely gone to bed.

But the other her was still in school uniform, loitering in the streets at an hour that would surely elicit questioning from the police.

Also, she was meeting someone in an alley downtown.

No, whether the other person was human was still unknown.

While wandering the streets, a tall, dark shadow called to her.

Then she was given the drug that gave rise to her birth.

There was only one command received--Make Kujou Hisui smell the drug.

Only that.

The girl only agreed because she wanted to know Hisui's true nature hidden in his heart. She wanted to know how much she meant to the boy who hung around Rushella all day, occasionally showing sighs of sorrow.

Of course, supposing his doppelganger was born, it might not be a good thing for her necessarily.

Relying on uncertain phenomenon only meant obtaining uncertain results. No one could guarantee this could help her.

If it were her other self, if it were her who was always considerate of others, surely she would not choose this path.

--Hence, I shall be the one to take this path.

"You are really seeking your own destruction. As expected, your main body is still more human."

"Are you praising me?"

Reina answered briefly to the seductive voice.

Her voice sounded more like a boss lady from a night establishment pulling customers from the streets rather than the usual honors student.

"You will eventually disappear. But if you do not return to the main body, that body cannot escape the fate of weakening. That is how doppelgangers work. If the other self gains too well-defined an ego, then both will disappear. But if you return to the main body, you will be sunk into the depths of consciousness again. That highly self-disciplined true self will not allow you to see the light of day again."

"...What do you want me to do?"

The other person did not answer.

That person shrugged in an exaggerated manner, looking like it did not matter.

Taking the small bottle from Reina's hand, she had no intention of issuing other missions.

"You are free. Do as you wish. Do something the other you cannot do."

"...Who are you? Why do you... Kujou-kun...?"

"I want to understand him more. Also, I want to test that irregular 'True Ancestor.' These are my only two goals."

"...?"

"We will probably never meet again. Act according to your wish, that's all."

She lifted her long cape and vanished into the air like a bird spreading its wings.

Reina was left alone under the night sky.

Her translucent body outline would make one wonder if the entire world had abandoned her.

Finally, the girl's figure was swallowed amidst the scenery of the streets at night.

The next day, there were many rumors among students--The serious and hardworking class rep was seen late at night downtown. Of course, the serious person in question had no idea of any of this.

There was another rumor--Under the color of night, a boy was roaming the streets with a cross-shaped white package carried on his back.

He did not do anything special, simply frequenting shops and convenience stores then shaking his head in loneliness.

Only one ramen shopkeeper had seen him before, together with a woman who seemed to be his relative. When he saw the boy standing outside his shop, the shopkeeper made conversation with him.

"Hey, little lad, I think you used to come here frequently..."

"Yeah, I came with my family. The flavor here is not bad and you don't use garlic."

"...Hmm, eh, what happened to the pretty lady?"

Hearing the shopkeeper's question, the boy simply smiled with loneliness.

It was a tearful smiling look, concentrating infinite sorrow.

He turned and left without answering.

As the shopkeeper watched him leave, he heard a pitiful sigh:

"Miraluka..."

Translator's Notes and References:

1. A concept similar to naked apron in otaku culture.
2. A sound effect.
3. 幽霊でも恋がしたい！ (Yuurei-demo-koi-ga-shitai !), does it remind anyone of anything?

Chapter 5 - Sports Festival

Eruru woke up but found it difficult to open her eyes.

To begin with, the vampire blood coursing through her body suppressed her biological activity during the daytime. Furthermore, she had drunk black coffee before going to bed in spite of the consequences. The caffeine resulted in very light sleep and prevented her from waking up to a refreshing start.

Yawning adorably, she left the bedroom to wash her face.

Even after doing that, she still felt sleepy.

Due to not wearing her glasses, she found the living room quite blurred in view.

In any case, she began to remove her pajamas to get changed.

Having another coffee later would fix things.

...As soon as she made mental plans to make herself presentable, she discovered she had forgotten to prepare her change of clothes.

Whatever, undress first then return to the bedroom... After taking off her pajamas, Eruru noticed a familiar smell.

The refreshing and energizing fragrance of coffee.

This was rich coffee prepared by skills superior to her own.

Her consciousness gradually growing more awake, Eruru looked towards the kitchen.

This kitchen, which she seldom used, was currently fulfilling its worth while a superbly skilled cook was preparing breakfast inside.

Hisui made breakfast while trying his best not to look towards Eruru, advising indifferently:

"...You'd better put on some clothes first."

This sentence made Eruru completely awake.

Blushing, she frantically checked her condition.

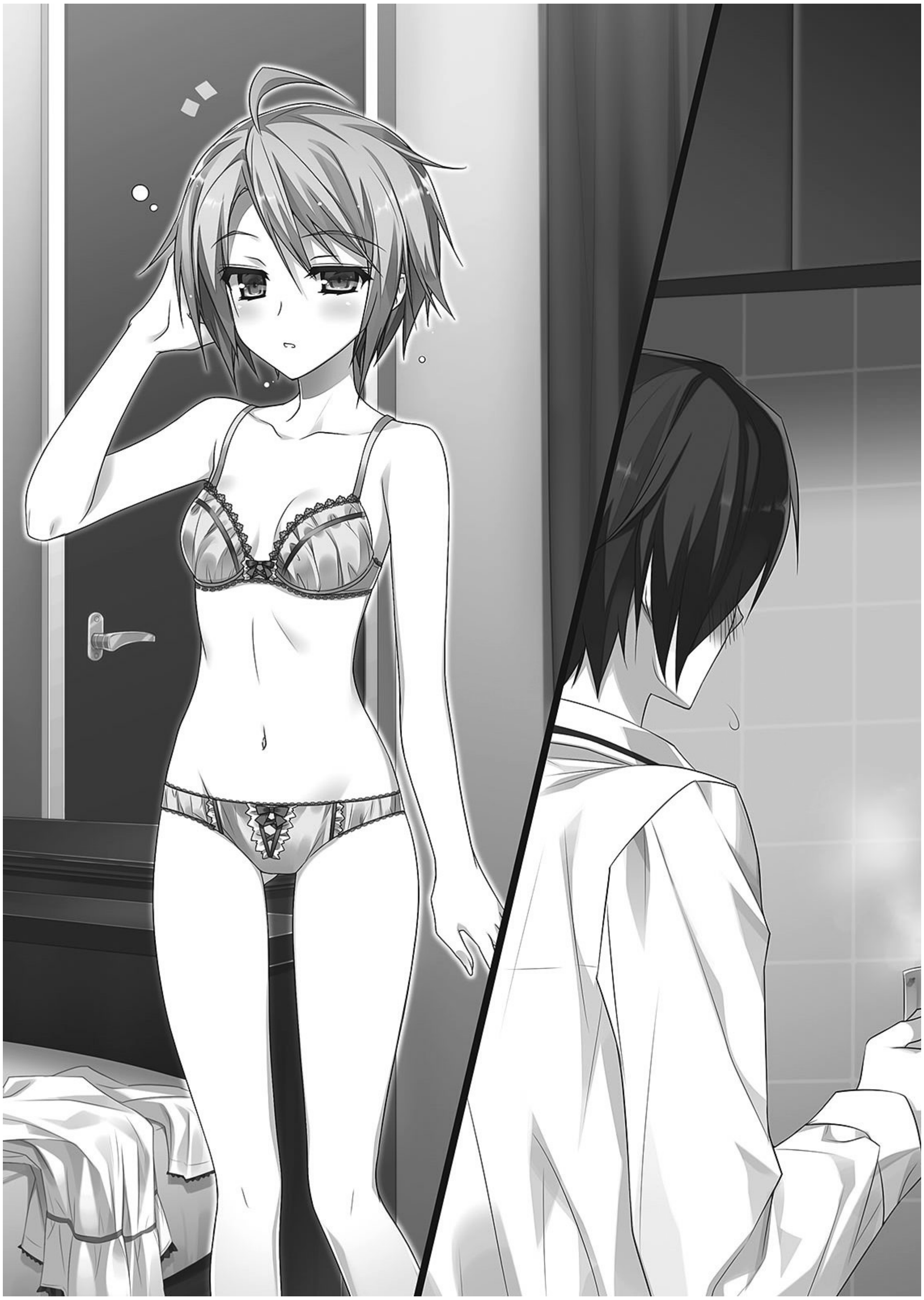
All she was wearing was underwear.

A cute pink bra covered the gentle curves of her chest, accompanied by a pair of panties.

Her pajamas were haphazardly scattered in the surroundings.

"Y-You...!"

"Yeah, I know, after all, it's your own home... Right? My parent used to go around naked all the time... Yeah."



Hisui brought the salad and fried eggs to the dining table and consoled her.

However, his eyes were furtively glancing at Eruru in her underwear.

"E-Erase those memories instantly!!"

"Hey, don't point your gun at me! Where the heck did you pull that out from!? Where did you conceal that gun!?"

"Shut your trap!!"

Although she did not shoot, she still used Argentum as a bludgeoning weapon to whack Hisui hard.

Several minutes later, face still red, Eruru was dressed and sitting at the dining table with a furious look.

"Remember your lesson..."

"No no, that's the wrong reaction, right? I'm the one who's heavily injured."

All bruised up in the face, Hisui sat opposite to her.

Although Eruru did hold back, Hisui was suffering terribly from external wounds and internal bleeding, having lost his special constitution that healed his wounds quickly.

"Say, you really should pay more attention with a boy in the house... You're totally unguarded when you wake up, you know?"

"S-Shut your trap!! Why did you keep staring!?"

"You're the one who ran over. Oh well, it's quite common for people who act all reliable outside to have an undisciplined side at home. Hurry and eat, okay?"

Hisui spoke and urged Eruru to start eating.

Eruru's face was still red but she finally drank a sip of coffee and picked up the newspaper.

"...The taste is not bad, but if you think this is enough to make me forgive you, you are thoroughly mistaken... Speaking of which, why did you make all this?"

"Uh, since you let me live here, I went with the flow. Say, your fridge is totally empty and your kitchen is pretty much unused, clean as brand new. You really should do more house work."

"Such a nag... All I need is minimum nourishment!"

"In terms of food, that vampire who used to live in my home was a lot more particular than you. Say, why do you live alone? I heard yesterday that you're already working."

"...I live separate from my mother. Because there is no need to live together."

"Your dad?"

"...I have no father. Please do not mention this word again."

With a face filled with resentment, Eruru finished the bitter drink in her cup with one gulp.

Seeing her reaction, it was obvious which of her parents was the vampire.

For his own personal safety, Hisui decided it would be best not to mention her father.

"...Want more coffee?"

"Another cup."

Still miffed, Eruru passed the empty cup over.

Hisui smiled wryly while refilling Eruru's cup, then cleared the utensils to wash.

The way it looked, Hisui was totally the master of the kitchen.

"So... What are your plans?"

"What plans... I was thinking yesterday, ultimately, an official request needs to be made to the Supernatural Investigations Section. The best course of action is to ask them to track down your doppelganger. It is also quite worrying what treatment Rushella might receive... In the worst case scenario, I shall personally keep her under continuous surveillance to prevent others from arbitrarily issuing extermination orders."

"Sure... Thanks."

"Why do you sound so unconcerned!? Do you understand your current situation!?"

"More or less. I've thought about it overnight and organized things. Also, you're a good person. That's one point I managed to clear up."

"..."

Eruru gnashed her teeth without saying a word, her face red.

Hisui had apparently said that in the past.

As expected, people's true personalities never change.

"So, I'll leave the rest of the dishes to you. I'll be late if I don't leave soon."

"...? Wait, where are you going!?"

"Hmm, it's school. Of course, I mean high school, not middle school."

"What are you talking about...? You are currently...!"

"I don't have my current knowledge or memories. But I'm still a high school student. I'm sure my tuition is paid using Miraluka's money, so I can't go skipping class."

"But...!"

"If I feel an urge to drink blood, I'll bite my lip and drink my own blood. Although it's a last resort, it does work to some degree for someone like me who's in the middle of turning into a vampire. Could you tell those people I met in school yesterday, to help out in case of emergencies."

Hisui finished in one breath, not showing any intention to skip school.

Stopping him was easy.

Although he was in the process of turning into a vampire, he was no match for Eruru after all.

There were tons of ways to stop him.

But Eruru agreed reluctantly.

"Do as you wish. However... Please do not leave my side in school."

"Yes yes."

Hence... The two left the house and went on their way together.

Two beings suffering from the same miseries--a vampire's victim and a half-vampire. Under the sun's direct rays, they rushed into the classroom as the bell rang, bearing tired faces.

Rushella was already in the classroom. Looking at the two of them with depressed eye, she then averted her gaze.

Hisui went to his seat, neighboring hers.

"...Good morning."

He greeted her but Rushella did not respond.

In the end, the two of them did not exchange a word until after school that day.

After school, Hisui and Eruru went to the empty classroom together.

Hisui had no memories of this classroom or the club..

But according to Eruru, the ghost and the student council vice-president were running around for his sake so he should show up to listen to the report of their findings at least. As for other circumstances, Eruru had not mentioned them.

Rushella... apparently wasn't coming.

After all, she was currently a criminal suspect. Mei was in charge of her surveillance and so was absent as well.

Although Hisui had no memory... Rushella's affairs made him especially worried.

The expression she showed when she realized Hisui was turning into a vampire...

Although apart from his parent, Hisui had never met any other vampire. But definitely, no other vampire would show that kind of face.

Even if he really had that kind of constitution for the past year... A vampire was not going to make that kind of expression towards prey.

Hisui could not figure it out, so he scratched his head.

Hisui and Eruru finally reached the classroom, Hisui pushed the door and entered...

"Ah...!"

Someone was changing inside.

She did not look anything like a high schooler, but did not appear to be a teacher either, a woman with a trim and tight physique. She had just taken off her women's suit, leaving a black sports bra and simple shorts that matched.

"...What are you doing? Oogami-san."

Eruru was the first to speak.

"Hmm, just as you can see, I'm in the middle of changing... Hey, what are you looking at!?"

"I'm not looking."

Hisui answered calmly then frantically shifted his gaze away.

Mmm, that muscular athlete's body.

Graceful and limber.

There probably exist people with a thing for that.

But Hisui had no such fetish.

"W-Why are you acting so uninterested!? Ah... Maybe you're shy? Well, you are a boy after all, well? Still a high schooler? Can't be helped... Since you want to look, it's not like you can't..."

"Let's go outside, Kariya."

"Yes. Sorry for disturbing you while you are changing."

"What, that bored face as a reaction!? Hold it right there..."

...Rangetsu was just about to chase out the door when she suddenly remembered how stupid it was to be only wearing underwear, leaving her no choice but to retreat with a reddened face.

Hisui closed the door and bid farewell to Rangetsu's exposed body, asking Eruru:

"Hmm, who's that?"

"I believe there is no need for you to remember. Rather, it would be better to forget directly."

"Yeah, I get the same feeling."

Just as Hisui crossed his arms and nodded in agreement, he was grabbed by the back of his collar and dragged into the classroom.

"Hey, what the fuck!?"

"I'm changed. So how is it, does it suit me?"

Rangetsu made a pose in the middle of the classroom.

It looked quite legit... But her attire was greatly problematic.

She was wearing a plain black tracksuit without any decoration.

Normally, this would a PE teacher's workclothes. Right now with the sports festival coming up, all teachers and students were training and getting ready so other subject teachers were willing to wear this sort of tracksuit.

"Eh, what's the situation?"

"An undercover investigation... Well, it's not that exaggerated, I'm simply changing clothes to blend in so that I can move more freely in school, you see? Nominally, I'm an instructor hired from outside for the sports festival period. The school is informed already. Although I can't be stationed at school all the time, up until the sports festival this weekend, I've already planned to lurk here already, you know?"

"Yeah, good job..."

"What's with that unmotivated answer? Don't you want to be instructed by such a good-looking teacher like me?"

Rangetsu flaunted her slender body and leaned over but Hisui was unmoved.

"No... Um, this look suits you very well."

"Oh my, aren't you honest today?"

"Although I find women who are suited to tracksuits are a bit unusual."

"Putting aside an athlete's airs, you are completely unattractive as a woman."

Eruru entered the classroom and expressed her view with displeasure.

Rangetsu scowled viciously, revealing her long canines but Eruru was unfazed. In a contest of fangs, she had her own set anyway.

"...Speaking of which, Kujou-kun... I smell blood on your neck? What's the matter?"

Rangetsu looked at the bandaid on Hisui's neck and asked acutely.

As expected of a detective from the Supernatural Investigations Section. Hisui's current condition could not escape her sense of smell of course, rivaling a police dog's.

"Actually..."

Eruru sighed and explained things roughly to her.

"...I see, I get the situation now. But it's not commendable that you're not reporting to the Supernatural Investigations Section, you know?"

"...I know."

This was all Eruru acting on her own and could not be considered a wise plan.

Hisui and Rushella were supposed to be quarantined instead.

"That said, we currently lack manpower and you seem to have minimum safeguards... Whatever, Kujou-kun, if you have someone to supervise you, I allow you freedom of movement. Also, about that vampire called Rushella..."

"No problem. Don't mind her."

As the victim, Hisui seemed unconcerned.

Rangetsu's former self would definitely not have compromised so easily but unbelievably, she now accepted.

"Is that so...? Actually, the situation remains the same, just that your body has produced symptoms. In any case, there is Sudou-san in charge of surveillance... However, if anything happens, you will take full responsibility, is that clear?"

Rangetsu was staring at Eruru in a terrifying manner while asking.

The two were originally enemies in a struggle between factions but were sent to the same battlefield simply due to their mission. Having them cooperate fully would be asking for too much.

Now that she was lending Eruru a favor and could use this as leverage to make Eruru take the fall and get kicked out if the situation turned south, Rangetsu stood to gain no matter what standpoint things developed.

"No problem. I have already resolved myself to take the responsibility. But even so, I did not really expect you to agree so easily."

Rangetsu went hmph and looked at Hisui then changed the topic while resting her face on her hands.

"...Then what? What are your plans next?"

"Please listen to these girls first."

Eruru's sharp hearing had already picked up on the footsteps approaching the classroom.

Although it was one person's steps, two individuals entered.

Kirika and Touko.

"Eh, you are... Oogami-san, right?"

"Oh, it's the errand girl."

"Who is the errand girl!?"

Rangetsu protested against Touko's comment before facing Eruru again.

"They are the collaborators you mentioned?"

"Yes. Please have a seat, you two. Let us confirm the many plans we have ahead of us."

Kirika nodded and sat down while Touko hovered in the surroundings as usual.

Ignoring Touko, Eruru started the Supernatural Investigations Club + Supernatural Investigations Section joint meeting.

"Currently, the sports festival is being held as scheduled. So... Have there been any more threatening letters?"

Eruru asked Kirika. The vice-president shook her head.

"None received. Due to the earlier tent incident, the teachers and the students in sports clubs have been more on guard. None of the facilities and equipment have shown damage so far."

"Oh, I was also wandering around school to help watch, you know?"

"...As for sightings of Touko-san, witnesses have increased greatly, how troubling..."

Kirika grumbled bitterly.

The ghost with great initiative really wasn't saving any effort.

"...However, Touko-san's presence really is a great help. About the doppelganger matter I have asked grandma already. This type of half-tangible body case is quite hard to capture. However, if Touko-san does it, she should be able to sense the doppelganger. After all, doppelgangers are considered pseudo spiritual entities, they should be able to interfere with each other."

"Conversely, the other side will be on guard against Touko-san. To this date, he has not come to school, probably because Touko-san is present?"

Hisui spoke slowly.

Although he had lost his memories and was in the process of turning into a vampire, his observation skills and knowledge on supernatural entities remained unchanged.

Rangetsu showed an impressed look after listening.

"You're quite sharp. Then what do you plan on doing?"

"Nothing much. But since it's hard for him to interfere with the school before the sports festival, he'll probably make a commotion on the day of the festival, right... Say, the doppelganger of the class rep who sits next to me, any news on that?"

"The only ones who saw her directly were you and Uno-san. Currently, your memories are unclear. Have you recalled anything?"

"Nothing. But... I know class rep is a good person and very kind to me."

Hisui answered Eruru's question while plunged into deep thought.

Seeing him in deep thought, Eruru turned the topic to the day of the sports festival.

"Right now, we must maintain vigilance and the problem is the actual day of the sports festival. Currently, there is Oogami-san's help and Touko-san can also contribute... Also... We will handle things as the situation changes, I suppose. The biggest problem... is confirming Sera-san and Kujou-san's doppelgangers. Although they are certain to be nearby, if the state of separation persists, they will all disappear eventually... I am not worrying excessively, am I?"

Realizing the gravity of the situation, Rangetsu nodded solemnly.

"Indeed, finding the doppelgangers is top priority... But how should it be done?"

"Oh, grandma told me about this. Since they are sure to be nearby, a barrier can be erected to slowly decrease their area of movement. But this type of barrier has its limits, so I am not too sure how small an area they can be forced into..."

Kirika supported her face while frowning and looking at Hisui with worry. The vampirization process and the weakening caused by the doppelganger were causing Hisui great suffering.

"...Just try it, make the area as small as possible. What would be best would be this... Force them into the school."

Hisui responded to Kirika and hoped she could give a specific plan.

"That is possible, but... Why the school?"

"Having a precise location is best. My doppelganger aside, class rep's one should take the bait easily, after all, this is where her goal is located."

"...Possibly. My side will take care of manpower and equipment on the barrier. Finally, one more question I'd like to ask... Is that vampire really okay?"

Just as the plan was being settled, Rangetsu raised an uncertain element.

Although the doppelgangers were a tricky problem, Rushella's issue was also worrying.

"According to Kariya-san, she has not sucked blood from anyone apart from Kujou-kun. But that's no longer an option in this incident. If she sucks another person's blood, she will surely become a target for extermination."

"We have not confirmed that fact yet. If indeed she has sucked another person's blood, I will personally execute her myself."

Eruru spoke coldly.

After all, she had pointed her gun at Rushella before.

"I was thinking yes, I don't need to worry about that. But the problem is if she insists on her principles and suppressed the urge. Suppressing is very painful, right?"

No one said anything

Apart from Hisui, everyone present knew Rushella's personality, in other words, they held a certain kind of trust in her.

Most likely, Rushella was not going to suck anyone's blood but Hisui's.

She will choose to endure.

But once endurance reached a limit, vampires went berserk.

"Kujou-san's blood has been collected on a regular basis to use for transfusions to Kujou-san himself and as Rushella's emergency rations. He has a certain level of stock at home, so it should be enough to last until this incident is resolved."

"...Very well."

Hearing Eruru's explanation, Rangetsu also accepted the contingency plan and stood up.

"Then I'll take a casual walk around school. Before the sports festival arrives, everyone do their jobs properly."

"...Yes."

Then the joint meeting ended.

Time for school to end, Hisui went on his way home.

However, he went to Eruru's home instead of his old and familiar house.

Staring at his house's direction, Hisui's eyes reflected the setting sun.

How was Rushella now?

"Say, you..."

"What?"

Mei was currently preparing dinner while Rushella was on the side, sprawling on the dining table.

Although Rushella did not help out at all, bored with nothing to do, she simply waited nearby.

"...Don't you need to drink blood? Hi-kun's blood... There's stock stored up, right?"

Mei pointed to the small fridge next to the normal fridge and asked.

This was essential in any vampire or dhampir home, a fridge for storing blood packs.

"...Speaking of which, if using blood packs could satisfy vampires, why do they still need to attack humans? Sure would save the hassle."

"Although it quenches the thirst, the taste is terrible! After trying it once, I want to vomit every time I recall the taste! Even Hisui's blood is the same. I want to suck blood directly and it has to be the neck! Although other parts are way better than blood packs, it's still not satisfying!"

"...How picky. You sound completely like some kind of gourmet food critic's ego."

"Don't humans seek delicious food, not satisfied with merely sustaining life!? Otherwise, can't humans just eat a bit of those 'supplements'!?"

"You sure know how to pick at weakpoints. Perhaps what you say is right... But humans don't attack other people."

"..."

"Had you endured a little at the time, Hi-kun wouldn't have ended up like this."

"...Shut up."

Rushella shouted then fell silent.

Mei did not press the matter and turned to more practical matters.

"Although I get that you don't need to drink every day, you're almost at your limit, right? Oh, but the higher a vampire's rank, the stronger the endurance, right?"

"According to Hisui, that parent of his went cold turkey for one year as her best record. But that was going quite far to the limit. Luckily she drank backup blood kept for emergencies. A little later and she would most likely have started attacking people indiscriminately."

"How scary. I don't thik you have that level of self-control, so hurry up and drink some. If you cause trouble, you'll surely get executed, you know?"

"...Shut up and hurry with dinner!"

"Like I said, isn't it fine even if you don't eat this? Jeez, why do I have to cook for you... Oh, how about I make a lunchbox for Hi-kun on the day of the sports festival~ After all, Eruru-chan definitely isn't going to do it, perhaps it's a chance?"

"That guy... Will he come?"

Rushella muttered to herself.

The sports festival was imminent.

Hisui was not very motivated in the first place and now with his health in this condition... Will he still participate?

Left to roam free in a place among crowd... Will Eruru permit it?

"Who knows... But weren't you all fired up for it? You're still having morning practice with the class rep, right?"

"...Yeah. But she seems quite tired. Is it because of the doppelganger's effects..."

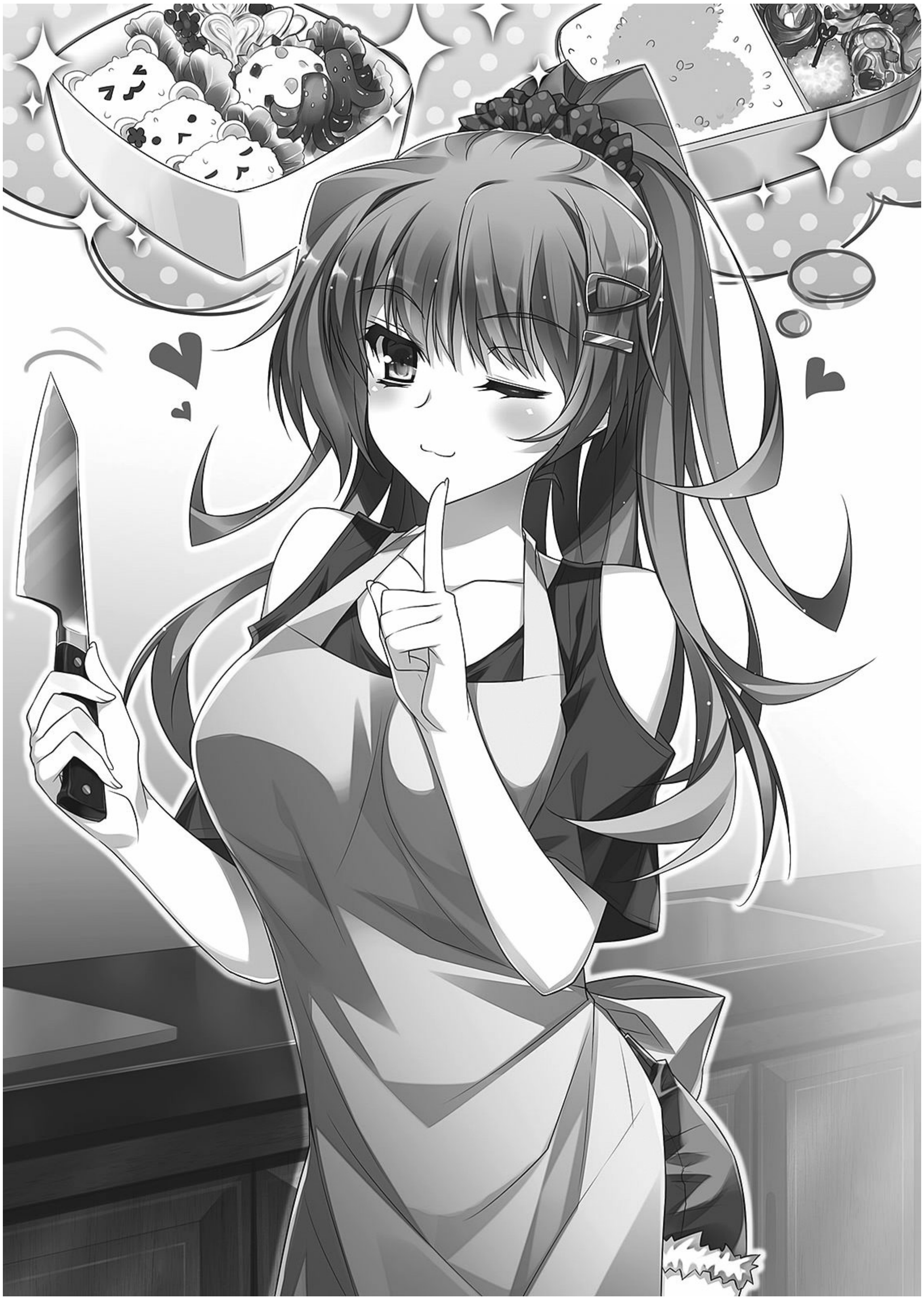
"You have to do your best too. Of course, I'll have to properly prepared a special lunchbox for Hi-kun❤"

Mei was filled with anticipation for the coming sports festival.

Rushella first glared at her unhappily then thought of something and stood up from her chair.

"Lunchbox huh..."

"...What? You're not asking me to help make you one, are you? Seriously, isn't it better if you drank blood instead on that day? Although you have the light blocking agent, being under the sun is still unpleasant, right?"



"So noisy, shut up. Well, umm... Just think of it as practical experience. It's not like I can't help you with cooking, you know?"

Unbelievably, Rushella compromised and walked over.

Although she still had her arms crossed and her face held up high.

"Forget it, your help's not needed. The kitchen is innocent."

"What does it matter!? Don't be shy!!"

"No, it's really not needed! Hold on, hey, I'm holding the kitchen knife here!!"

"What does it matter!?"

Several minutes later, because Rushella insisted on helping, the kitchen's sorry state could only be described as a battlefield.

"Like I said, don't come over! Not only is the pot overflowing, but it's also about to explode!?"

"Okay, let's turn up the heat...!"

"Arghhh, I've had enough!!"

...In the end, their dinner that night ended in shambles.

Meanwhile, at Eruru's home.

"...I feel like something big is happening at home. It must be that, that whatever linking of senses between a vampire and the victim, probably a bit more reliable than premonitions."

"If she cuts the link, it is pointless, right? This is purely your own premonition. Although I feel that premonitions tend to be real."

"Say, Kariya, why am I the one to cook and do the dishes every time? Although you're providing a roof for me, can't you cook once in a while?"

"Pizza and sushi can be ordered for delivery. The convenience store is close by too. If you walk a little further, there are many restaurants."

"I'm beginning to understand why your growth is stunted."

As a result, Eruru gave Hisui a kick while he was washing the dishes.

The first weekend in Hisui and Rushella's separated lives arrived.

Usually a holiday, this Sunday also carried the special significance of the sports festival. Students filed into school.

Announcing the sports festival's opening, fireworks flew into the sky while all students were lined up at the opening ceremony.

Standing there unsteadily, Hisui seemed like an odd one out.

Mei stood near him and asked with worry.

"Hey... Are you okay?"

"...Seems... a little something's up. Although I can overcome the hazy consciousness and dazed mind that comes with the vampirization process... Sunlight is terrible. I guess I should have gotten a transfusion first...? Also, my doppelganger... If it doesn't get found, looks like it could get dangerous..."

"Oogami-san and Touko-san have been patrolling the entire school. I heard that Uno-san has to stay in festival's hosting headquarters. Once the festival ends, she will join in the search. Say... You should be resting at home today, right? Why did you come running here on purpose?"

Eruru leaned in as well, whispering quietly with both care and reprimand.

Hisui felt a bit apologetic but still answered with a brave face.

"...If I'm absent, Rushella would feel bad, right?"

Saying that, he glanced secretly at Rushella, but she happened to be looking at him as well.

But as soon as their eyes met, she instantly turned her gaze away and bowed her head.

"What an idiot you are."

"I know, okay. Time to do the march. Hurry to your spot."

Mei and Eruru had no choice but to return to their positions.

The teachers on the main platform gave orders and the entire student body moved to their assigned positions on stand by according to year and class.

The sports festival was raising its curtain officially.

No sooner had it began, Hisui's stamina had already reached a limit.

Although the actual events he was participating was a sprint in the morning and the full class relay at the end in the afternoon, due to the heavens giving an ideal sunny day as a gift to the sports festival, he felt terrible even when sitting down.

It came as no surprise that he was last place in the sprinting event.

The short distance run made Hisui rapidly drain his remaining energy. Coming to a certain tent in the the resting area, he collapsed in a heap like a corpse.

Even when the bell rang to signal the lunch break, he remained completely still.

"Umm... Are you okay, Kujou-kun...?"

When he noticed, Reina was on the side, looking at him with worry.

"Oh nothing. Class rep, are you okay? I see your face not looking too good?"

"Hmm, I'm fine..."

Unlike Hisui, she was not undergoing vampirization, but likewise, she had half her soul separated.

Also, she participated in many more events than Hisui in the morning.

This is likely physical exhaustion right now.

"Next up... I just have the relay remaining."

"Really...? Oh, it's noon, have you eaten yet? Are your parents bringing you a lunchbox?"

"My parents aren't coming... Then I'll be off? You really should take care."

"Yeah..."

Once high school rolled around, many legal guardians didn't bother to attend sports festivals anymore.

The issue of lunch were mostly handled by groups of friends together.

So where Reina was running of to was easy to guess.

That said... Hisui still forced himself to stand up and chase after her.

After that, Rushella came to Hisui's spot.

She was carrying two lunchboxes... An apprehensive look on her face.

But Hisui was already gone.

After looking in the surroundings, she ran off to find Hisui as well.

After parting with Hisui, Reina came to a deserted spot behind the school building.

Her body felt terrible.

Very tired, lacking in strength all over.

To avoid heat stroke, she had drunk water frequently today, taking care to avoid direct sunlight.

However, her stamina kept draining nonstop.

No appetite and it felt like everything she swallowed instantly evaporated.

Reina sighed and started doing self-massages and simply stretching exercises to alleviate her fatigue.

There was still the full class relay in the afternoon.

She had to make the most of her time to recover her energy and run for a good standing.

"I cannot fail anymore."

Originally, she thought that her fatigue came from the mental stress of past failure, but she did not seem that obsessed with the past.

Thanks to accompanying Rushella in morning practice, her mindset had relaxed a lot.

Very incredible... Even though it was such a serious case of mental trauma.

"Am I overthinking things?"

"No."

"Eh?"

A familiar voice was heard.

One that she heard every single day.

Her own voice.

Turning around, she saw herself.

One dressed in uniform, one dressed in gym clothes--two people like mirror images but with different clothing.

Before Reina could scream, the other her swung her right arm.

"...!"

The iron pole in her hand struck Reina's leg, making a blunt sound.

This was violence coming from another her.

Reina clutched her right leg and collapsed on the ground.

No fracture nor obvious external wounds... But it was so painful she could not walk.

"W-What are you doing...?"

"This is your wish, you know? Don't want to run, want to escape... That's why I was born. The lack of burden in your heart is thanks to me."

"...!? What are you talking about? I...!"

"No problem. I am your shadow. You just need to relax. This ends here. You can forfeit the relay completely."

The other Reina spoke, raising the iron pole above her head.

She was aiming a second strike at Reina's head.

Reina closed her eyes in fear, enduring the pain and terror.

However, the final strike did not fall.

"Kujou-kun...!"

She looked up and saw Hisui grabbing the other her's arm.

"You...!"

"Stop it now, it's enough, you know?"

"Let me go... This is our problem...!"

"...That's true. That's why you hit yourself."

The other Reina instantly went expressionless.

But she quickly recovered, rather than a vicious face filled with negative emotions, it was her original, calm expression.

"Even without destroying the sports festival, there are many ways to make class rep not have to run. Actually, she just needs to forfeit on her own. If she's injured, no one will blame her. This method doesn't hurt others but hurts herself deeply. So that's the conclusion you reached, that's right, because you're also class rep."

"Don't talk like you know everything...!"

"I don't know. Sorry, I currently lost my memory. But even just interacting with you for these few days, I know you're a good person. Don't hurt yourself anymore."

The other Reina bit her lip hard.

The iron pole had fallen from her hand onto the ground.

"I won't say insensitive stuff like telling you to face your mental trauma bravely. After all, you already accompanied that girl for morning practice for so long, you don't need anyone else to comfort you. So... Don't bear the burden alone. Having the two of you complementing each other's strengths and weaknesses is the best."

Hisui pointed at the Reina who was kneeling on the ground.

That was her other self.

"Although... I don't quite get it... Still, sorry."

The girl who had resorted to violence bowed her head in shame.

"Umm... This is my fault, I guess? So... I will be considerate of you from now on!"

Finally, she smiled while speaking.

In that instant, as though something possessing her had left, the other Reina collapsed.

Even the outline of the body was vanishing. In this manner, she fell upon her true body.

And Reina caught her.

Overlapping, the two bodies became one.

Within the blink of an eye, only one Reina remained.

"I..."

Reina held her leg while looking up at Hisui.

Due to the confusion in memories, she did not seem to understand what took place before her.

Simply holding her right leg, she sat in a crouching position unsteadily on the ground.

"Hey, what just happened!?"

Dressed in a tracksuit, Rangetsu was running over athletically.

She seemed to have sniffed something during her patrol.

"You came at the right time. Could you take class rep to the infirmary. Her doppelganger has returned to her body."

"Really!? Thank goodness... What about yours?"

"That one, I have a hunch somewhere. I'll go try my luck."

Chapter 6 - The Last Runner

It was near the end of the lunch break when Rushella went to look for Hisui.

Seeing him enter the classroom block, Rushella originally intended to call out to him but seeing some kind of determined look on Hisui's face, she changed her mind.

Hence she hid her presence and secretly followed him.

Hisui went up the stairs and towards the roof.

Because it was during the sports festival, the classroom block was very deserted. Plus the lunch break was about to end, there was almost no one there.

On this empty roof, waiting for Hisui was--the other him.

Rushella gulped and hid in the shadow of the roof shed while watching the two Hisuis meet.

"Hi, me."

Hisui waved and greeted himself.

The other him grabbed the metal net fencing on the roof edge and looked down.

Dressed in the high school uniform, carrying the cross-shaped sacred sword, the Tzara Blade, wrapped in white cloth.

He turned around. His face was identical to Hisui's.

But the deep sorrow in his eyes made him a completely different person from the usual Hisui.

It was Hisui's doppelganger, carrying the Anti-Drac mode constitution and his memories from the past year.

However, what he possessed was not limited to that.

"...How did you know I was here?"

"After all, it's my own thinking."

"..."

"For this kind of event like sports festivals or athletic meets, Miraluka always observed from this kind of place. She didn't want to attract too much attention. Also, carrying a parasol would hinder other student's parents from photographing them. Besides, her eyesight was amazingly good... Watching from up here would be good enough. So, did I guess right?"

"Yeah. As expected of myself."

The other Hisui answered weakly with self-deprecation.

"Then... The question is, what are you doing here?"

"Since it's you, you should understand, right?"

The other Hisui asked him in return.

Hisui leaned against the shed's wall and looked up at the sky.

"Miraluka's dead."

"..."

"I don't remember. Because you have that memory. But I heard from other people. Strangely enough, I don't feel sad."

"I thought so."

"I should be terribly sad. In fact, I do feel like there's a hollow in my heart, but it's nothing serious. Clearly I should be utterly sad. In other words... Carrying these feelings, you must be in great suffering. You are bearing all this for me, right?"

"..."

The other Hisui did not answer.

The feelings and memories after Miraluka was lost--were all with him.

He must be immersed in a swamp of sadness.

"I was thinking, if Miraluka was gone, what would I do? I think I'll be very depressed and shocked."

"Correct. In fact, that's what your summer vacation was like. Having few friends to begin with, you ended up being further estranged. And started not trusting anyone. Using a hyperbole, you didn't trust the world. You didn't trust this world which did not have Miraluka."

The other Hisui spoke in a torrent of words.

Talking about sadness, talking about loneliness, talking about his feelings for that woman who had passed away from this world.

"Then... Finally pulling yourself together, you entered the high school entrance exam. For a change of pace, to make a clean break of the past, you chose this high school where no one knew you. What a lame reason for your choice of school."

"Isn't that great? Also, don't insult yourself so much, it'll make me sad."

Hisui lowered his gaze in sadness.

After all, the other guy was himself. Whether speaking ill or self-abusing, it all reflected on himself.

"Can't be helped, during the most depressing time, you were me. Until yesterday, I was wandering the streets. Carrying Miraluka's past possessions, going to those place visited together before. Really fucking lame."

The other Hisui laughed in a lonely manner.

As the listener, naturally, Hisui did not laugh.

How could anyone laugh.

"Although I already know that she's no longer here. But... I still feel so reluctant to accept it. After all, I didn't even get to say anything..."

"...Yeah. I understand. Not even a word of thanks."

The current Hisui did not have complete knowledge of Miraluka. However, he still knew that they had parted suddenly.

Back when he scraped his knee and Miraluka showed her true nature as a vampire for an instant--After that, he had not even said a simple "I don't mind" to her.

All this time, all along, he was never able to say it out.

"So even now, you still feel sad, right?"

With abject pain, Hisui asked his other self.

Just like Reina.

It was all his own fault for being incompetent, which was why the doppelganger before his eyes had to shoulder the heavy burden.

"It's the same for you, right...? These feelings are enough for two people... No, even two people cannot shoulder it all."

The other Hisui answered.

His eyes carried bottomless melancholy.

These feelings would be better off forgotten.

However.

"It's about time you return. At this rate, I'm gonna croak. If it means forgetting for a lifetime, I don't want it."

"Perhaps your current state is better."

"Give it up... No matter how painful, I still want to be able to remember at least upon my death."

"..."

"Only because it's you, I'll tell you this."

Hisui took a deep breath.

No one else is allowed to hear this.

For a whole lifetime, he absolutely won't tell anyone this.

Apart from himself, never.

"Once upon a time, I loved her."

Hisui heard the sound of something falling on the ground behind him.

Like something rolling on the ground, rupturing, breaking into pieces.

As in happened, a sudden gust of strong wind blew, covering up that sound. Even the quick and light footsteps leaving downstairs could not be heard by Hisui.

"Perhaps it was love for a mother, or love for an older sister, or a first crush... Anyway, I loved her, I was serious."

Finally, he said it out.

In this world without Miraluka.

Although saying it out had no meaning, at least he managed to say it out.

The other Hisui smiled tragically, turning into a grieving audience.

"Aren't you embarrassed to say that?"

"So noisy, shut up. If you think it's embarrassing, then you go ahead and feel embarrassed."

"If I return, you'll surely feel more suffering?"

"I know. But... Lacking memories is also painful. Not only Miraluka... But Rushella as well."

"..."

"The reason why I can still live my days properly after Miraluka was gone, it's actually thanks to Rushella, right?"

The other Hisui did not answer.

Silently, he smiled and stepped forward.

The two Hisuis intersected and overlapped.

The instant the Hisui in uniform touched the main body, they merged into one.

The clone left behind the Tzara Blade, falling to the floor with a crisp clink.

Hisui picked up cross-shaped sacred sword and stretched lightly.

"I finally managed to retrieve my original feelings."

He lightly reached towards his neck and tore off the bandaid.

Touching it, he confirmed the disappearance of the fearsome teeth marks.

"Now I can stop worrying. Wow, the afternoon competitions have started already... I'd better hurry to the relay match... Eh, what's this?"

Just as he was about to go downstairs, Hisui noticed a lunchbox by his feet.

Probably the plastic lid popped off when it fell, the contents were all spilt. Luckily, the cloth wrapped around the lunchbox was still intact, so the food did not scatter all over the floor.

"...Hmm?"

This cloth and lunchbox... Hisui recognized it.

Those were clearly his.

"Why...? Could it be that girl!?"

Hisui looked downwards, then frantically ran downstairs and looked all around.

But the classroom block seemed to be empty.

Rushella had already ran off.

"...Idiot."

Rushella grumbled, wandering behind the school building.

Students, teachers and parents were all gathered at the sports ground right now so no one came over to this classroom block.

Hisui... was probably still over there.

Definitely.

Rushella knew very well in her heart.

She knew from the start.

Even had she not bitten him, even if just an ordinary person... A long time ago, to this date, continuing into the future, Hisui's heart always belonged to Miraluka.

While she walked like this, tears naturally fell down.

Unstoppable.

Rushella could only cover her face with both hands.

Pressing her fingers to seal her tears in her eye lids, she desperately suppressed herself.

After a while, she put down her hands but her vision was blurred by the tears.

Then a dark mass appeared before her, dark enough to distort rays of light.

Clad in a pitch-black cape, the tall shadow was rich in vampire style, exuding an aura that dyed the surroundings of this little path red as blood.

The long black hair resembled a piece of darkness that was plucked then combed into threads while those crimson lips were even redder than fresh blood.

Most unforgettable of all was that skin of pure white, surpassing all creation in this world.

She seemed to have applied light blocking agent, her skin exhibiting a subtle sheen, blocking sunlight.

This was supposed to be artificial armor that reduced a vampire's beauty.

But the absolute beauty of her skin did not suffer at all from this.

Whether her lips or her black hair, everything was so perfectly flawless.

To sum up her face in one sentence, that was a beautiful face born from darkness.

The same kind of beauty as Rushella's, but more refined and honed, the beauty of maturity.

To this date, Rushella had seen many beauties.

Although differences in beauty varied from person to person, categorizing them into three, six or nine ranks perhaps depended on personal preference.

But this woman before her was undoubtedly more beautiful than her.

More accurately, there was a difference in fundamental nature.

In front of this woman, she was at best a cute little girl--Rushella could not help but feel a sense of defeat.

"...Who are you!?"

"I am one of your kind, in every sense of the word."

Her face closed in.

Also those blood-red lips.

Even as a fellow female, it produced a sense of lust in the viewer, so seductive it compelled one to suck on them.

The woman parted her lips slightly, exhaling sweet breath.

The instant she smelled that scent, Rushella felt intense dizziness.

"What... are you... doing!?"

"Trying out a toy I obtained. It's already used up now."

With her porcelain-like hand, she crushed the small bottle in her hand, turning it into powdered glass scattered on the floor.

"It's the doppelganger huh...? No way, I am...!"

"You are a vampire. In a certain sense, vampires cannot be considered complete entities, they are existences intermediate between physical bodies of flesh and spiritual bodies. Hence, you won't turn out like that girl or boy. Just that your true nature will be exposed completely."

"...!?"

"You are thirsting, right?"

She reached out to stroke the throat of Rushella who was collapsed on the ground. With sharp finger nails, she clawed at her skin.

"I understand... that thirst enough to drive one mad. For a vampire, it is essentially hell. It would be better if one were used to it. It would be better if one could accept any filthy blood, no matter how lowly. But not for you. Because you have sucked Hisui's blood, you are already accustomed to that fragrant blood and taking it for granted."

"Who... on... earth... are you!?"

She did not answer.

Then she left Rushella.

"W-Wait...!"

Despite knowing it was useless, Rushella still reached out a hand towards her.

Her other hand pressed down on her own throat.

Because the terrifying thirst was surging up.

Irrepressible desire spread throughout her entire body.

For Hisui and Reina, their inner self was liberated.

But vampires could not do the same.

They simply exhibited the true selves hidden within.

The struggle between reason and instinct.

With a scream akin to vomiting blood, Rushella called for the one she desired.

"Hisui...!"

"Sorry I'm late. It's my fault for putting us in last place..."

Hisui got back from the relay track and headed over to Mei and Eruru, bowing his head in apology.

He barely managed to return in time for his spot as the runner for the second leg of the race, rushing onto the track to receive the baton and run at full speed.

Hisui's class had already fallen behind with the first runner, so due to the leg delayed by Hisui, they fell to last place.

"...Don't worry, it's fine. By the way... Is your condition okay?"

"I won't die. Ah, but I wanna puke."

"Why are you holding your belly after running such a short distance? That is way too weak of you."

Eruru's reprimands were perfectly reasonable.

Although Hisui currently was not in perfect health, he was running way too poorly.

Plus clutching his belly right now.

"It wasn't easy catching my doppelganger. The class rep's was found too, although she forfeited the relay. Happy ending, right?"

"Well... I guess."

"Then only Rushella is left, right?"

Mei and Eruru had run their part already and were resting on stand by.

They both held back, so Hisui's class was still dead last.

And the difference was quite large.

"Hey... Isn't it almost time for her to run? And we need to choose a new final leg... In this kind of situation, someone has to run twice, right?"

"They're discussing it right now. Oh, coming up, she's here."

Mei pointed to the other side of the circular field.

Each leg of the whole-class relay race was half a circuit around the track--hence, the runners must separate into odds and evens, standing on opposite sides of the track, waiting for the baton to pass to their hand.

And this moment, it was Rushella's turn to stand on the starting line.

Because they were trailing far behind the other classes, Rushella was standing there alone.

"Thank goodness, she finally came. I can watch the results of her training... Hey, isn't there something wrong?"

Hisui was the first to notice the unusual situation.

Even from far away, he saw very clearly.

Rushella was trembling all over, hugging herself desperately.

On the hands hugging herself, the fingernails were exceptionally long.

"Hey... She looks really thirsty. Isn't she a 'True Ancestor' at least...? Can't she bear it for a bit...?"

"I do not know the specifics regarding her condition but this clearly an emergency. As much as I am reluctant to cause a scene in public... There is no choice now."

Argentum's luster already flashed in Eruru's hand.

Hiding behind Mei, she tried to be as inconspicuous as possible. If necessary, she was going to shoot.

"Hey stop it... What are you thinking!?"

"That is my line. Do you not understand after seeing the way she looks...? Clearly an abnormal state. You should know very clearly what a vampire in thirst is like, right!?"

"..."

This was the destiny of blood that no vampire could escape.

When the thirst for blood reached a peak, they lost all rationality and turned in beasts feeding on fresh blood.

Hisui anxiously looked towards Rushella then revealed a smile.

The runner before Rushella reached out to her, handing the baton.

Then... Rushella caught it.

Although her hand trembled somewhat, she caught it steadily.

"...See, the results of practice is showing, right?"

"Please stop feeling impressed about the inconsequential."

Eruru scolded strictly. Beside her, Mei also showed a solemn face.

Nevertheless, Hisui ignored them and turned towards the nearby classmates who had also finished running.

"Sorry everyone. I'll take the final leg. After all, you guys still haven't decided, right?"

"Eh~~?"

"That's not too good, right?"

"Although being dead last is for certain, giving up in despair is a bit..."

"Say, has your stomach ache stopped?"

...Looks like there was grumbling aplenty.

Hisui knew very well his position in the class.

Just as Hisui was at a loss, a voice from behind helped him out.

"Let Kujou-kun go."

He turned around to see Reina.

Her right leg was wrapped in bandages while she spoke with a smile. Rangetsu was supporting her.

"This was originally my responsibility... Kujou-kun, I'm counting on you."

"...Thanks."

Hisui accepted Reina's request and headed over to the starting line.

Since Reina spoke up, the others had no objections... silently watching Hisui.

Then... Rushella arrived.

Although the sunlight was intense, she was running way too slowly.

Desperately fighting against the impulse inside her body, she was reaching her limit.

After all, Hisui was right before her eyes.

The desired blood was within reach.

"Hisui...!"

Calling out at the same time, Rushella licked her lips.

Her running speed suddenly rose.

The baton in her hand was becoming hard to hold.

Her other hand, empty, reached towards the flesh and blood she had desired for a long time.

Mei prepared herself, gathering sunlight in her eyes.

Eruru lifted the gun.

Rangetsu made a stance like a carnivorous and ferocious beast.

But Hisui took action faster than them, faster than anyone else.

In contravention of relay race norms, he ran over towards Rushella.

Then to avoid letting others see her horrifying appearance, he spread his arms and hugged her.

Hisui proactively put his neck towards Rushella's mouth, letting her drink his blood.

Without making a sound, he endured all pain.

Simply running up to embrace the girl who was collapsing from utter exhaustion--That was surely what spectators saw.

The entire school's eyes were focused on the two of them.

In a duration too short to call an instant, Hisui whispered in Rushella's ear:

"The lunchbox was delicious."

"...!"

The light of rationality lit up in Rushella's eyes.

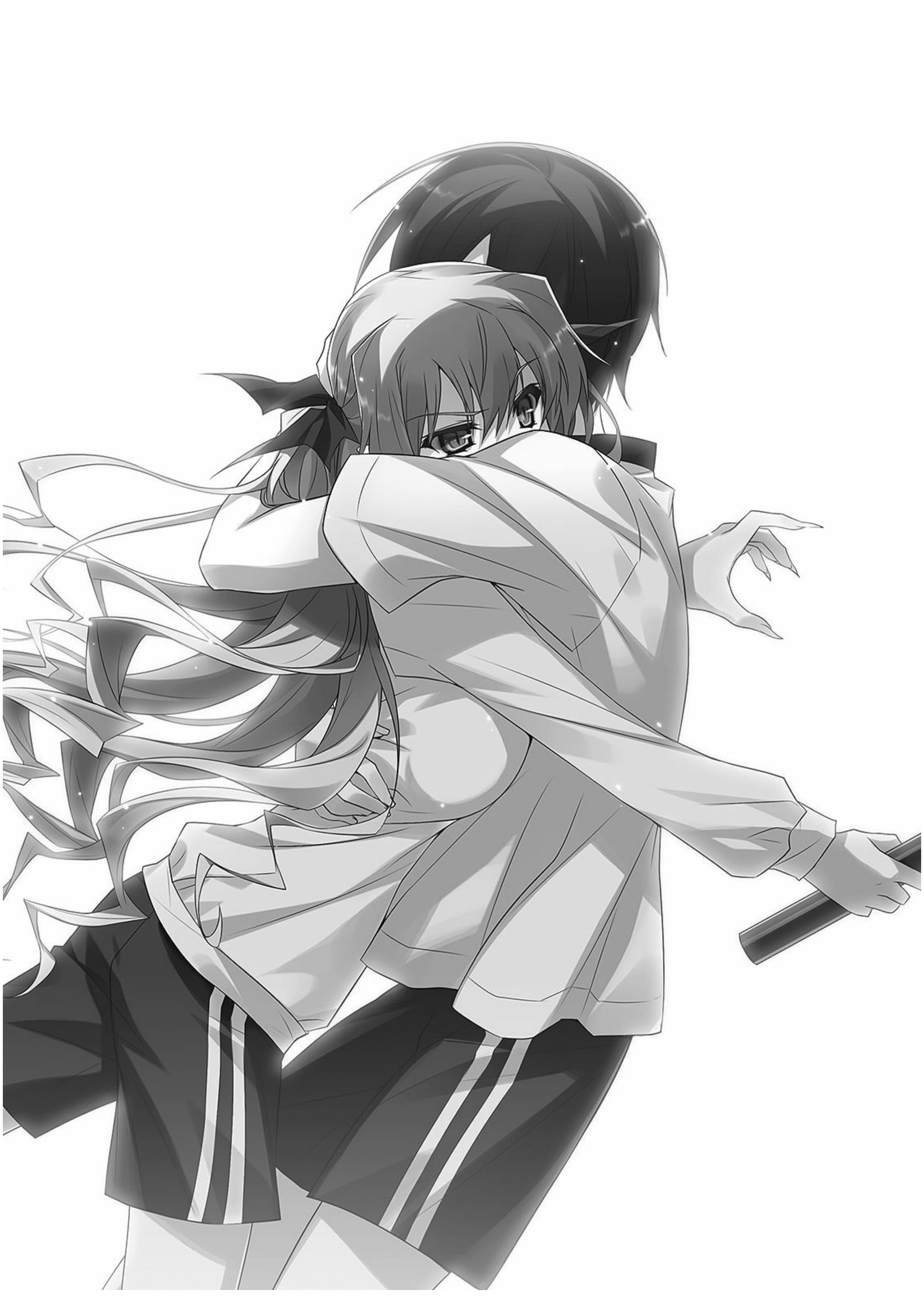
Because of Hisui's words or because of Hisui's blood... Surely both reasons were responsible.

Hisui's existence manged to rescue Rushella's mind, on the verge of collapse.

"If I had to say something, you're still at a developing stage. Honestly, why is the omelette looking like that and the hamburger steak is raw, it's totally mind boggling."

"You're being noisy... Shut up..."

Rushella protested in a trembling voice. Her dainty hand clutched desperately at Hisui's back to avoid falling over.



"B-But the effort nearly killed me... Treated like an idiotic by that girl, cutting myself in the hand, getting up early..."

"I know, I know. Now you can understand some of my pain, right?"

"So noisy... In any case, in any case, it's Miraluka who's better...!"

"You're more important than that dead person."

These words caused all strength to drain from Rushella's entire body.

She was already on the verge of tears.

No matter what era, sweet words were the easiest form of instant cure.

Even between a vampire and a human... it was the same.

The baton slid off from Rushella's hand.

Just before it hit the ground, Hisui caught it.

"Sorry, I'm leaving this girl to you."

Hisui gently pushed Rushella away, entrusting her to Rangetsu.

Rushella looked like she had something to say. Hisui deliberately ignored her gaze and touched his neck.

His bleeding had stopped.

But the body that was vampirizing only just earlier was seriously anemic.

And just now, Rushella had sucked with reckless abandon.

In fact, standing was difficult with this body that had suffered excessive blood loss.

Nevertheless, this was what allowed him to do what was not usually possible.

"Eli Eli lama sabachthani...!"

Accompanied by increasingly loud heart beats, Hisui chanted the incantation.

The black emblem resembling thorns appeared on his neck.

There was no worry even if other students saw it.

After all, this was only going to flash through their memories briefly.

Together with this body, flying past before their eyes.

Anti-Drac mode, activate.

Instantly, Hisui's outline blurred.

The only people who could capture him in their view were Rushella and the girls, the supernatural creatures.

Hisui raced along the track with lightning speed.

The distance with the other classes was shrinking.

Originally wide enough to be despairing, he closed the distance within the blink of an eye.

"So fast... Kujou-kun is too fast!! He passed three people all at once!!"

The announcer's energetic voice was relaying Hisui's heroic feat on the track.

It was Kirika who had snatched the megaphone, so emotional that her cheeks were scarlet.

After the live announcement, cheers began to sound repeatedly as the entire school focused their eyes on Hisui.

This was good.

With that, no one would remember Rushella's scene just now.

Although this contravened Hisui's philosophy of an ordinary school life...

"Once in a while, I guess."

Hisui sighed and entered the final stretch, the straight part of the track.

The final leg runner in first place was just ahead, a few meters away.

"I know this counts as cheating, please forgive me."

"Finally only one person left to pass! Kujou-kun, you are too amazing!!"

Hisui's speed dropped all at once.

Also, the entire school's gaze focused on Kirika.

Red in the face, she returned to her spot at the student council.

Then... As though his tense nerves had snapped, Hisui was slowing down.

Before he knew it, the emblem on his neck had vanished.

"Ah, it was no good after all."

Leaving these last words, Hisui crossed the finish line, falling over forwards.

Naturally, he was second place.

"You great idiot! I can't believe you failed to get first having gone this far! Doesn't this make my training go all to waste!?"

"Don't say anymore..."

Hisui had no strength to argue with the unreasonable Rushella.

If he did not wait quietly for his blood to recover, or get a blood transfusion quick, his life really would be in danger.

"Oh well... Whatever, I forgive you."

Saying that, Rushella hugged Hisui in her bosom, pressing his head tightly between her breasts.

"Ah! Hey, that's my job! Move aside!!"

Mei ended up hugging him as well.

Getting crushed by two pairs of giant breasts was no joking matter. Hisui felt his consciousness flying far away.

Crap crap crap crap crap crap crap, super crap hyper crap.

However, there would be no regrets dying like this with his consciousness far gone.

His classmates, particularly the boys, were staring at him with murderous eyes.

Eruru and Rangetsu's eyes were filled with despise.

For some reason, Reina was getting tearful.

Finally abusing public authority for private intentions, Kirika grabbed the megaphone specifically and yelled "Hey over there! Hurry and get off the track once you finish running!"

"...Oh well, whatever. Oh dear, I'm really out of blood..."

"Ah, hey, don't sleep! Pull yourself together!"

Several minutes later, Hisui was carried to the infirmary.

After that, he received a transfusion from the blood delivered by Eruru, lying on the bed while listening to the closing ceremony speeches. Thus Hisui's sports festival was finally concluded.

Epilogue

"...Is this reasonable? I'm so tired I collapsed, but I'm still forced to stay behind and clean up the sports festival venue, is this reasonable?"

"Cut the crap and work fast. Seriously, why do I even have to..."

Rangetsu grumbled while carrying the tent's frame to the storeroom.

The sports festival ended on a successful note. Now all that remained was clean up work to put away the tents, chairs, sound equipment *etc*.

The student council members had cleared up a portion and left the remainder for Vice-President Kirika to handle.

The Supernatural Investigations Club plus Rangetsu were helping out Kirika, doing the clean up.

Undoubtedly, Touko was simply cheering for them, moving her mouth but not her hands.

Because sunset was fast approaching, as a ghost, Touko was getting rambunctious.

"So, Touko-san, I've got a very simple question. Where were you during the sports festival? Were you wandering in school all this time!?"

"Of course not. I spectated every event properly... Ah."

"How stupid of me to even think of relying on you."

"Because I want to enjoy the springtime of youth... During the relay race, I was running alongside you guys, didn't you notice!?"

"Scary! If the parents took photos, they'd surely end up with ghost photos!!"

"Don't worry, I'm very photogenic! Although it ends up a bit blurry, only a part of my body shows up in the photo..."

"Hmm, please choose one of the following: find an exorcist or join one of those paranormal shows on television. I beg you, please please keep a low profile in events like these."

Hisui shooed the wandering spirit away with displeasure, immersing himself in his work.

It was almost sundown when the clean up was done and the Supernatural Investigations Club plus Rangetsu could finally leave.

"Man~ I'm dead tired. My only salvation is that tomorrow is swapped with today to give a holiday..."

"Yes, it's time for proper relaxing!"

"He can't relax with you around, right? Say, Hi-kun, would you like to take this opportunity to live with me!?"

"I should advise you to give up, Sudou-san. If he were to peek when you are changing, do not say I did not warn you, okay?"

"Hold on a second, I cannot ignore this... What is going on, what happened when Kujou-kun was staying in Kariya-san's home?"

"Jeez, it's just changing clothes. He saw me already, you know?"

Rangetsu interjected seductively.

But the faction of four girls coldly shook their heads.

" " " "No one cares about you." " " "

"What kind of treatment is this!? What value are you placing on my naked body!?"

"To be honest, I find Kariya more of a sight."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

Feeling Eruru's tone of voice sound as cold as knife's blade, Hisui quickened his steps out of the school gates.

Just as everyone left school, about to return to their respective homes...

She came.

Darkness followed her, the canopy of the night descending at her command.

Everyone felt an unusual aura.

Small animals, birds, insects... All creatures' presences vanished.

Clad in a cape, the tall lady walked on the street. As though fearing the arrival of a monarch, as though opening a path for her, all creatures fled from her.

"It's you...!"

Rushella drew a dagger.

She had not told Hisui's group about the earlier encounter yet.

But even if she had not mentioned it, everyone noticed the unusual change in the surroundings.

Mei, Eruru, Kirika, Rangetsu, they all entered combat stances.

Only one person, Hisui, stayed rooted to the ground in shock.

Hisui recognized that peerless, beautiful face, standing out clearly against the color of the night.

No photo.

No video.

Drawings could not recreate her beauty.

Mirrors could not reflect her appearance.

Only memory could record her peerless visage.

"Hello again."

She smiled faintly.

Like a tender mother.

Like a mischievous older sister.

Like a seductive lover.

As though gliding, she approached Hisui.

Until her graceful and slender hand brushed against Hisui's cheek, no one made any reaction.

Because her action was too natural and due to the look on Hisui's face, almost about to burst into tears.

"Don't touch him!"

Only Rushella sprang into action.

Holding her dagger in a reverse grip, she stabbed towards the woman's arm!

But the woman remained unconcerned, standing there unfazed.

The laser from Mei's eyes was effortlessly neutralized by the wave of her hand.

Kirika's curse was completely ineffective against her.

Eruru's bullet was blocked harmlessly by her hand.

Rangetsu charged, but collapsed on the ground after a light shove from her.

"Miraluka...!?"

Finally, Hisui called out her name.

The name of the person he once loved, the one who had raised him.

The name of the person who had originally died.

"Why are you...!?"

"How lively your surroundings have become. Oh well, is this what is known as growth? How lonely it feels for me, yet delightful too... But contemptible."

These words were said by her as his mother, his sister and lover at the same time--Covering all "female" identities.

Her crimson eyes were especially filled with hostility towards Rushella.

"Imposter and failure. You have no right to suck my Hisui's blood. Make yourself scarce now."

"...What are you talking about? You're the imposter... Miraluka is already...!"

"Do you really believe that? My immmortality... as well as the impossibility of my leaving you, casting you to the winds. Shouldn't you know this best?"

Hisui fell silent.

She was right.

A vampire with eternal life and youth, a True Ancestor to boot.

Could not possibly have died.

But she definitely died.

For me.

"Since you are alive, why...!?"

"I am very confused too. One day, you and I must bid farewell to each other. That is the way things are between humans and vampires. However... Due to a pest's infestation, I cannot stand aside."

Her crimson lips approached Hisui's neck.

Stop--Everyone called out to stop her.

Rushella reached out.

But Hisui himself was unmoved.

The crimson tongue extended from her lips and licked lightly.

Then it moved towards his lips.

A light kiss, parting quickly immediately.

"You must be exhausted today. Go home and rest properly. Let us leave the talking for next time... A good long talk."

"Wait up... Hey!"

Miraluka ignored Hisui and turned towards Rushella.

"Today I finally understand completely. Sure enough, you are the imposter. Let alone a True Ancestor, you even have no right to call yourself blood kin."

"...What are you talking about!? I...!"

"You are nobody. No family, no friends, no servants either. This is only natural, because you are merely just a doll, born out of thin air."

"...!?"

"Were you a True Ancestor, in this kind of night, everyone present should be bowing down to you as subjects. Are you capable of that? You cannot. Furthermore, can you restrain your desire for blood? Although even one such as I cannot escape the destiny of blood, I am at least hundreds, thousands of times superior to you. A vampire that cannot restrain themselves is worse than an insect, let alone a human."

"Bitch...!"

"Your desires will end up killing Hisui. It's about time you realized that."

These were the last of her words.

With a flutter of her cape, Miraluka turned and departed. No one chased after her.

Originally expected to chase after her for sure, even Hisui sat collapsed on the ground, drained of strength.

"What the fuck... What the fuck is this!?"

No one could answer.

No one knew how this came about.

The group dallied for a while before leaving.

Finally back home, Hisui was still showing shock in his face.

He did not get changed but simply lay down on the living room couch, staring blankly at the ceiling. Then Rushella got on top of him.

"You're so heavy."

"So noisy, shut up! Stop thinking about that woman! So outrageous, kissing directly..."

"She is a kissing demon. She already took my first and second kisses along time ago. Sigh, I really don't get it... I'm not going to think anymore, going to bed now, move aside please."

"No."

Rushella had already changed into her usual shirt and kept Hisui pinned down firmly.

In order not to let him escape, she pressed her voluptuous bosom against him.

"Hey, move that aside."

"No~!"

Thumping her arms and legs, she rubbed her face against Hisui's chest.

Indeed, she really did lack a True Ancestor's dignified airs for sure.

"...Why do you regress into a child as soon as you stick to me?"

"...I don't know, so you're believing that woman...?"

Rushella's eyes were glimmering with tears already.

Hisui smiled wryly and extended his hand, placing it on the top of Rushella's head.

"I already said, my mind is a super mess. Even if that really is her and she's still alive, what I want to express first is anger to demand that she explain things clearly. Also... Although she insulted you thoroughly, you really aren't that strong as a True Ancestor, plus you're a bit lacking in stateliness, you know?"

Rushella did not speak, simply hammering Hisui haphazardly.

Indeed, she was showing signs of regressing into a child.

A voluptuous body, lost memories, childlike innocence.

"My bad, okay, stop it. I have no intention of kicking you out either."

"..."

"Worst case scenario, I'll just have to leave this place and live alone. Anyway... I'll talk with her, talk about all sorts of things. So... What? Hey! Rushella-san?"

Before he knew it, Rushella was already asleep.

Her sleeping face looked relaxed and peaceful, her massive bust weighing on Hisui's body, heaving up and down with her breathing.

"Ending with this move huh?"

Hisui also gave up on grappling with the issues in his mind and chose to sleep.

After all, the next day was a holiday and he was going to be woken up by her fangs again... Oh well, that could not be helped either.

After all... This could no longer be separated from his daily live.

Because this kind of everyday life had become matter-of-fact.

Dawn came the next day and Rushella woke up first as usual.

But she did not suck his blood.

She simply brought herself close to Hisui's face.

"Such a sloppy sleeping face again."

Rushella rubbed their faces together but Hisui did not wake up.

"I know without needing that woman to tell me."

With eyes filled with determination, she murmured faintly.

Indeed, compared to that kind of woman.

Compared to the kind of woman who simply lived with Hisui in the past.

She understood Hisui better.

Worrying about Hisui's safety.

Yesterday, Hisui had almost lost his life again due to her.

That happened last time and the time before that as well.

It will probably happen again in the future.

Staying by his side, sucking his blood, fighting those who plotted to harm her.

Hence--

This morning today, a vampire's kiss was not needed.

Instead, she bestowed a true kiss upon him.

Rushella gently pressed her lips onto Hisui's lips.

Perhaps this was the first and last time, a true kiss.

Hisui remained asleep.

Separating their lips, Rushella smiled at his sleeping face and said:

"I had a happy time."

This was her farewell.

Tears were seeping into her smiling eyes, but no one knew.

Rushella slowly got up and left without returning.

"...Eh, Rushella?"

When Hisui opened his eyes, Rushella was not present.

Although he found it strange for the sun was already up high, Hisui still made lunch out of habit.

He finally understood.

Rushella's presence had disappeared completely.

Checking her room, he found the coffin gone.

Hisui called Mei and Eruru... No one knew Rushella's whereabouts.

As the cliched saying went, people only cherish things after they've lost them.

On that autumn morning, Kujou Hisui's high school life was liberated from a crimson fate.

Afterword

Hello everyone, I am Totsuki.

I am not a vampire but just an extremely ordinary human. But while writing this book, I lived a messed up life with all sorts of upside down schedules, living like a vampire completely.

Including the editors, I've caused many people lots of trouble, so I should simply put on a stone mask and forsake my human identity in exchange for writing speed and creativity--I seriously considered this kind of question.

Giving up on being human or giving up writing, if I had to choose between the two, I guess I'd choose the former after all?

Oh well, I don't leave the house much usually and get much sun, perhaps it's too late already. Next time, I'd better check the length of my canines.

...Okay, I should end the chatting here and get back to the main subject.

I will enter spoiler territory here, so please be careful, my friend, if you haven't read the book yet.

During the writing process, I realized there were great shifts in the story's development.

Hisui and Rushella's story was gradually reaching a climax. I intended to consider future developments while reviewing the story's opening, so I dug out some settings I never got to using.

When I first started wanting to write about a vampire theme, I intended to make the protagonist a vampire boy.

Of course, the setting was that he drank milk instead of blood.

Think about it, everyone... Blood and milk fundamentally come from the same materials, right?

...Then, since the protagonist has lived for centuries after all, his suckling technique is quite awesome, causing many ladies to be lost in ecstasy, all conquered by his mouth. But the protagonist himself enters sage mode every time after suckling... No, what I mean is that with his desires satisfied, he says something like "Phew... Why are you still here? Get lost already." As though he was very exhausted.

Yes, I read my earlier file and then silently closed it.

How should I comment on this? Officially known as unused ideas, I feel like this is basically a book of dark history.

Of course, the the editor in charge never mentioned that idea and I now understand why this series was chosen.

Ever since, I have caused lots of trouble for the editors. I reflect deeply.

Not only for the editors but also all the readers to see the ending to Hisui and Rushella's story earlier, I will work my hardest to make that day come earlier. I hope everyone will support me to the very end.

Totsuki Yuu

銀の十字架（クロス）とドラキュリア

Silver Cross & Draculea

Ⅴ

十月ユウ

ファンタジア文庫

銀の十字架とドラキュリア
Silver Cross & Draculea
クロス
V

ミラルカ
ルシュラ＝ダーム
・ドラキュリア
緋水よ、
私は果たして本物なのか？

Prologue

Rushella had disappeared.

Expressing this simple fact of reality did not require particular mincing of words, but it took Hisui a lot of time to accept it.

On the holiday after the sports festival, it was already midday by the time Hisui woke up.

The bloody mornings--where Rushella bit his neck to drink blood--were now a thing of the past. Replacing them was something no different from what ordinary people experienced... Continuous sleep until waking up naturally.

Despite feeling something was amiss, Hisui still went to wash his face, get a drink of water and got to work making breakfast for two as habit dictated.

"Hey, are you still sleeping?"

Rushella could not possibly have gone out on her own.

Essentially, she always went out with Hisui. Even if Hisui was sleeping, she would rouse him from bed.

Hence, if Rushella could not be found, she was most likely in her bedroom... Miraluka's former bedroom.

Hisui expected her to have the door and windows shut tightly, in full vampire style, having sweet dreams in the darkness.

"...Eh?"

No one was there.

Rushella was not in the room. The bed also had no signs of being slept in.

The bedding was neat and tidy without the slight trace of lingering body warmth.

So be it if these were the only things amiss.

However, the problem was that all of Rushella's personal belongings were completely gone.

Her usual coffin was gone.

Naturally, it was not something to carry around just to go out.

Only then did Hisui realize.

Rushella... had disappeared.

"What's with that girl..."

Anxiety in his heart was unavoidable, but Hisui carried some measure of optimism.

Surely she had simply run off somewhere again.

Coffin, well... Maybe she took it out for some kind of special reason.

"Just in case..."

Hisui decided to first text and ask Mei, Eruru, Kirika--basically every girl who might be with her or might know Rushella's whereabouts.

Luckily, Rushella's circle of friends was very small, so those girls were the only ones she could go trouble.

Hisui did not think he had done anything to anger her. Hence, the girls should be bringing good news soon--That was what Hisui expected.

"I dunno. What, did you get into another fight!? Then take this opportunity to have babies with me, how's about that❤"

"No idea. As the custodian, please keep clear tabs on her comings and goings."

"Sorry, I have no idea. By the way, next Saturday... Are you free?"

The girls replied respectively in their willful, distinctive styles.

Hisui sighed and ate breakfast helplessly.

In any case, she should be returning on her own by night.

At least at the time, Hisui was still clinging onto this naive notion.

However, when night descended... Rushella still had not returned.

Only then did Hisui seriously start looking for her.

Apart from the coffin, all of Rushella's personal belongings were gone as well. This worried Hisui even more.

Not a single note. The only thing left behind were the gold coins that used to be kept in Rushella's coffin.

In a certain sense, these coins were actually the most essential when going out. Perhaps this stood as her determination to part ways.

"Rent for all this time... Is that what she means? What a totally unfunny joke..."

Hisui placed the sack of coins on the living room dining table then ran out into the streets at night.

Everywhere Rushella had visited in the past or might visit, even with the slightest probability, Hisui searched them one by one.

But came up emptyhanded.

Along the way, Hisui asked everyone he met. Even if he failed to find her person, getting some sort of clue would be helpful.

But there was not a single clue.

Finally, he came to school.

After all, she should come here when it was time for class, there was no particular need to search this place now.

But Hisui still climbed over the tightly shut school gate and entered the deserted school.

Because the classroom block was locked and could not be entered, Hisui had no choice but to wander outside.

As expected, Rushella was not found.

"Eh, Hisui-kun?"

In the end, all he found was the ghost roaming the school--Fuwa Touko.

Like a typical ghost, she was accompanied by ghostlights floating around her while she hovered in the air leisurely.

On a certain level, Hisui came to school also in order to question her. Since the ghost was bound to the school grounds, Hisui's only choice was to make a visit.

"Touko-san... Have you seen Rushella?"

"Nope. Why, did something happen?"

"...She's gone missing. I can't find her anywhere."

"Oh, she ran away from home!? She didn't leave a note!?"

"She didn't... That's why it's so worrying."

That's right--If she had left a cliched note like "Don't come find me", at least it wouldn't be this worrying. Because that kind of note would actually mean "Come find me."

Even if he didn't look for her, she would surely appear herself and complain "Come find me!"

Rushella had not left a note.

Leaving without a farewell, this conveyed the strength of her determination to part ways.

Judging from the circumstances... She probably was not abducted by force.

This was almost certainly her own will.

After searching the streets all night, Hisui was beginning to understand in his heart even if he was reluctant to accept reality.

"Don't go keeping all your worries to yourself, okay? Have you asked Kirika-chan and the others?"

"That's the first thing I did. Kariya also seems to be searching... But no news yet."

"..."

"Thank you for your cooperation. See you tomorrow... No, it's already tomorrow. See you in class."

Hisui's body was already not in the best of conditions. Due to running his hardest at the relay race in the sports festival and the blood loss--His current physical condition was terrible. Combined with the fatigue and anxiety from the search, Hisui left the school with stumbling steps.

If he returned home, perhaps Rushella might be back already.

Perhaps she might throw a tantrum because no one was in the house--"Why didn't you come back earlier!?"--Complaining as if she were not the one at fault.

Nevertheless, Hisui's hopes were dashed.

Lying down carelessly on the bed, Hisui slept like a log.

When early morning came, he dragged his heavy body to school but Rushella was not in the classroom.

Asking Mei and Eruru yielded nothing.

During the lunch break, he went to exchange info with Kirika but the result was equally in vain.

The second day, the third day--He repeated the above but the result did not change.

Based on what Eruru said, even some of the Supernatural Investigations Section staff were mobilized.

Despite verbal claims refusing to help, Rangetsu was apparently helping.

Still, there was no news on Rushella.

She had disappeared, leaving no trace behind.

A week, a month passed by. Autumn was over, winter was gradually approaching closer.

Before he knew it, days without Rushella had become his usual daily life.

At least, none of the people around Hisui mentioned Rushella again, possibly in consideration of Hisui's feelings.

Hence, when Hisui heard Rushella's name mentioned again, after a very long time--It was from the class rep Sera Reina.

"Draculea-san... When is she coming back?"

"Who knows."

Hisui answered indifferently.

After school, they were going home together coincidentally and walked together for a bit... Then Reina brought up Rushella after seemingly resolving herself.

Stealing glances at Hisui, she stuttered while continuing the subject.

"Did she... return home overseas? Did something happen over on that side?"

"No idea... I didn't hear anything about it. But... She must be having a good time there. So she'll probably stay there. Isn't that for the best?"

Hisui crafted reasonable and logical lies in a dry and boring tone of voice.

The fabricated backstory, that of distant relatives living abroad, also came in handy to a certain extent while Rushella was missing. Due to Eruru's arrangements, the school also completed withdrawal procedures.

However, Reina did not seem to believe these.

Although she said nothing on the surface, neither did she ask anything until now... Reina kept gazing towards Rushella's empty seat with mournful eyes.

"During the sports festival... Did something happen?"

"..."

Reina asked, refusing to give up.

"Nothing much. Nothing happened to you too, Class Rep, right?"

Hisui deliberately emphasized the last few words.

The doppelganger did not seem to have left Reina with any lingering side effects. This neighbor in the classroom remained as virtuous and dignified as before... However, surely she could not have completely forgotten everything that happened.

To some extent, she should have inherited the memories of the self that had split from her, or even realized Rushella's true identity perhaps.

But after the sports festival, Hisui--

"You probably had a nightmare because of the fatigue from training too much."

He covered up the issue with a simple sentence.

At the time, Reina looked like she had more to say but she did not press the matter.

She also seemed to have ideas regarding Rushella's disappearance but had kept silent all this time.

Perhaps this was part of her worrying for others but unfortunately, Hisui currently did not have any spare energy to be considerate of her feelings.

"...You're not going to pick her up?"

"Pick who up?"

"Draculea-san..."

"No news is good news, it means she's living well. After all, it's not like we're that related."

Indeed.

A vampire and a human--That was all their relationship amounted to.

Then Rushella had gone to the far side of the darkness.

"I'm going this way, bye."

Hisui waved indifferently and said goodbye to Reina.

He deliberately avoided looking at her face then started his lonely journey home.

Without Rushella around, the way home from school was extremely quiet.

But preparing for Christmas, the streets were noisier than usual.

There were decorated trees on the sidewalk, the neon lights were more striking than ever, waves of pedestrian crowds--Everything contrasted with Hisui's solitude.

He had already realized faintly.

Very likely, he will continue to be alone from now on.

Hence, when Hisui opened his home's door, he didn't bother with a "I'm home" greeting.

Even after discovering a pair of female high-heels at the entrance, he did not--

"...!?"

Hisui frantically took off his shoes and ran into the house.

Someone was in the living room.

He could hear the television.

"...Rushella!?"

He pushed the door open and ran into the living room.

But the instant he entered the room, Hisui could not help but show a troubled expression.

A woman was lying on the sofa nonchalantly.

That devil-may-care attitude and reclining posture was the same as Rushella's before, but the seductive effect was miles apart.

"Welcome home."

As though in her own home, she greeted Hisui nonchalantly.

The woman sat up. Her pale skin was clad in a black camisole dress, almost akin to underwear.

"Miraluka...?"

This existence, even more unexpected than Rushella, had appeared before Hisui's eyes.

This unforgettable woman who had turned into ashes once, disappearing after her sudden appearance at the sports festival.

"What's the matter, why are you zoning out there? At least brew me some tea, how about that?"

"...Stop joking around. I have tons of questions for you... She's already dead... Already dead, right in my arms. Then... who the heck are you!?"

While searching for Rushella, Hisui had been thinking many times.

His final conclusion--a fake.

There should be no mistake.

Surely this was the only possibility.

Although the woman before his eyes had perfect facial features as exquisite like a finely crafted masterpiece of nature, pale white skin that seemed almost transparent, sleek black lustrous hair... Although her lips were even redder than blood and the words from her lips were sounding clearly in his ears... Nevertheless, she was already gone.

She had turned into ash, blown away by the unruly wind, disappearing without trace.

All that was left of her was a handful of remains in Hisui's hand.

And even now, those were already gone too.

For someone who knew the real Miraluka, a flawless imposter was only a sight evocative of contempt.

"...Who are you? If your playing a joke on me in poor taste, be careful or

I'll--"

Hisui's eyes were flashing with dangerous light.

Normally, he would never say something like that. Hearing him, this woman possessing Miraluka's appearance simply shrugged in boredom before smiling seductively.

"Try it if you can."

Chapter 1 - Crimson Return

"Sorry, I apologize to you for getting carried away..."

Hisui was kneeling formally in seiza on the cold floor.

Not only was his face beaten and bruised... But his entire body was stripped naked apart from a pair of shorts.

He was supposed to be used to getting tormented by girls, but this time was really quite a predicament.

On the other hand, the culprit who had used brute force was lying on the sofa, gracefully savoring the barley tea that Hisui had brewed.

"Seriously, have you forgotten how you ought to be speaking towards me? With such a weak body still, I can't believe what gave you the courage to go against me."

She sighed and exclaimed in a tone of disbelief then ignored Hisui and turned back to watching the drama rerun on television.

Operating the remote control with experienced ease, she really acted as casually as though she was in her own home.

Hisui silently endured this series of undeserved treatment while pondering the situation.

Trying to act cool in a rare moment and even making a cool ultimatum... He ended up defeated in an instant.

First a finger flick to his head made him dizzy, then a punch to the gut and a kick arrived without him being able to put up any resistance. Finally, he was stripped of his clothing.

This level of treatment was totally on a different dimension.

Nevertheless, this was precisely the kind of daily life he used to share with Miraluka.

That's right... Hisui recalled it.

She was more seductive than Mei, more merciless than Eruru, more intelligent and sharp than Kirika, more elusive than Touko, more agile and faster than Rangetsu.

Furthermore, she was even more tyrannical and unreasonable than Rushella.

This was precisely the kind of woman he used to live with.

"...I just want to ask, where the heck did you come from? I know I can't beat you and it's also clear that you have vampire-level abilities."

In any case, using force was hopeless. Hisui asked with a strained face.

Eyes glued to the television, the woman replied nonchalantly.

"I am Miraluka. You can't even recognize the one who raised you? What an ingrate."

"Like I said! That woman died already! Stop bringing that up again and again, it's very hurtful..."

Recalling Miraluka's last moments, Hisui felt as though knives were stabbing into his heart.

The scene from that day was the only thing that he could not numb himself against, let alone forget.

"Vampires may have eternal life and youth indeed, but they are not indestructible. That's what she taught me. Although True Ancestors have especially powerful vitality, they also possess all the weaknesses of common vampires precisely because they are the progenitors of vampires. In particular, they fear sunlight and crosses. This is an unshakable rule that no True Ancestor can escape. Back then, Miraluka's light-blocking agent passed its time limit. And there was no time to reapply it. Because she was occupied with performing chest compressions on me."

"..."

"That's why she was under direct sunlight and went beyond her limit. Her body turned into ash and scattered away. In such conditions, how could she possibly die and resurrect?"

It was a memory that Hisui had no wish of recalling.

Yet recalling it precisely now, all he could feel was endless despair in his heart.

Under those conditions, a vampire could not possibly survive.

"Hmm... Well, it's not illogical for you to think this way."

"What do you mean, for me to think this way? That's the reality that I saw with my own eyes. What now, are you saying you have reasons that can convince me otherwise?"

Hearing his challenging tone of voice, the woman turned her gaze away from the television finally.

"It's a long story."

"Hurry and tell me. I will listen to all of it patiently."

"In actual fact, I lived. Done."

Summarizing in mere seconds, she turned back to the television again.

"...Hey, that's too brief! I knew it, you're just toying with me...!?"

Hisui stood up, clenching his weak and powerless fist, howling.

Then an ice-cold voice instantly smacked him.

"Who permitted you to stand up...? Looks like you need to be re-educated anew...?"

Hisui reflexively straightened his back and sat back down in formal seiza posture.

His body moved on its own.

Instead of a vampire's mystic eyes, this was rooted in a command that applied to all humans.

A son's inability to oppose the mother.

This command was apparently etched in their genes, rendering Hisui's own will powerless, causing his body to react first autonomously.

Hisui understood vaguely.

That Miraluka, her beauty was something that no magic, no matter how high level, could recreate.

It was said that numerous artists had begged her to serve as their model, but this sublime and unattainable beauty meant that she was a woman who ruined the careers of many artists.

They all ended up breaking their paintbrushes or self-mutilating with their chisels.

Miraluka had apparently bragged about this once when she was drunk. To be honest, it didn't sound like lying at all.

But in that case, then this woman, who looked identical to Miraluka--

"...Would you kindly explain more concretely, Onee-sama?"

Hisui compromised and spoke with a stiff face and cautious tones.

In any case, acting more humble was the only way to make progress right now.

"Looks like you finally remembered how you're supposed to speak. Hurry up and put your clothes on. How much longer are you going to force me to look upon that skinny and weak body of yours?"

"You're the one who stripped me first, okay..."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

Hisui turned to the side and put on his clothes. Then sitting on a cushion by the low table, he rested his chin against his hands, intending to listen to a story.

The speaker finally switched off the television and turned towards him.

"So... What on earth happened?"

"Because I am a True Ancestor."

"No, I know that already..."

"Those known as True Ancestors each possess unique powers. Do you still remember?"

"...Yeah."

Ever since early childhood, Hisui had learned a lot of knowledge about vampires through various tidbits from chats and conversations.

Although legends about vampires varied greatly, they all had the common feature of turning into vampires the people whom they sucked blood from, or using the mystic eyes. Vampires also had various individual powers unique to them.

For example, turning their body into mist, sharing certain senses with animals like bats, making their tangible body vanish and all sorts of transformations--These abilities were not shared by all vampires.

These special abilities were only passed down from parents to children and from masters to servants.

In other words, the presence of such powers depended on the progenitor of their vampire bloodline--The True Ancestor.

"These kinds of powers are on a fundamentally different level for True Ancestors when compared to descendants or servants. But even True Ancestors cannot possess every special power. And each bloodline can only have one ability... Isn't that right?"

Hisui recalled this theoretical knowledge that was totally useless in ordinary day-to-day life.

Although he did not learn it deliberately, this knowledge was already stuck in his mind from regular immersion and contact.

"Precisely. In actual fact, I definitely cannot turn into mist, nor undergo transformations. In that case, let me ask you, what is my special power?"

"How would I know? I've never heard you mention it despite how long we've lived together."

"Indeed, after all, in the past, I didn't know either."

"...Hey."

"I didn't know until that particular instant. That particular instant when destruction was imminent."

Hisui was dumbfounded.

The instant Miraluka was referring to was surely the time when her body collapsed and turned into ash and dust.

How had she escaped that unavoidable fate of destruction?

"Then what's your special ability...?"

"Expressed in words, it's simple. Ultimate regeneration."

"All vampires have regeneration, right!? Even for True Ancestors, they just have higher level compared to other vampires. But even so, it can't possibly overcome weaknesses... It can't overcome sunlight, right?"

"Indeed. Incinerated by sunlight, even I will be destroyed but I can last a lot longer than those small fries. And it was precisely this resilient body that saved me."

"...?"

"My body really did collapse and scatter in the wind, but back then, inside my body... the part that could be considered the core was not completely incinerated by sunlight. Oh well, even so, it was just a brief duration. But precisely during that brief fraction of a second, I obtained fresh blood."

This simple word was extremely convincing for Hisui.

To vampires, blood was the source of power.

Even when burnt by sunlight, on the verge of destruction, as long as blood was obtained, resurrection was definitely possible.

"But... your body was almost turned to ash completely and scattered in the wind, right? How did you obtain blood? Did the wind bring you blood?"

"You're half right. It was my loyal servants who brought me blood."

"Huh!?"

"Birds and insects... Countless beings flying in the sky. They brought me blood. It's a shame that bats are not active during the daytime and did not participate."

She spoke in amusement.

This queen, capable of turning all creation into her servants, her eyes flashed with a crimson glow.

"Mystic eyes...? No, you couldn't have used them under those conditions... Did you tame the creatures beforehand...?"

"It would have been a good idea to prepare them in advance as a precaution against emergencies. In fact, many vampires do use bats as familiars. But I'm a little different from them. I mentioned it just now, this is my power. When on the verge of death, almost losing my sense of self, all existence in the immediate surroundings will automatically turn into my servants to bring me fresh blood. This is a power that's completely useless except when on the verge of death, yet a power existing only to sustain eternal life."

Hisui finally figured it out.

This was not impossible nonsense.

Loyal servants played an important role in the immortality of vampires. Preparing means to replenish fresh blood were necessary for them.

However, life was unpredictable.

The woman right here possessed precisely the ultimate power to maintain eternal life and youth, the power to survive even this type of unpredicatable and abnormal situation.

But it was not omnipotent.

Just as she said, if the messengers bringing blood had been an instant later, she would surely have turned into dust, vanishing into the atmosphere.

Although the word "miracle" felt very wrong to associate with vampires whose lives were cursed, there was no better word to describe what had happened on that day.

"...What you say makes sense. But... why didn't you return immediately?"

Hisui asked unhappily.

Without noticing, his tone of voice sounded like a whining child asking to be spoiled.

"I couldn't help it. After all, my body was already battered and broken. With great difficulty, I finally regenerated my head and torso, but was lying pitifully sprawled on the ground, only able to crawl like a worm. Finally, I managed to crawl to a safe place shaded from sunlight but couldn't move anymore after that. Then I had the animals in the area bring me fresh blood. Luckily, rivers of blood were plentiful in a warzone, but the quality was terrible. The time needed to recover my entire body took an appallingly long time. Were I not a True Ancestor, it would very likely take as much as a hundred years. After I regained free mobility, full recovery took further time. Added to the fact that the two countries were cut off at the time, returning to Japan really took monumental effort. Having lived over two thousand years, I've truly never suffered this much."

She sighed like a human.

Her beautiful face also seemed to darken, clouded by those experiences.

Despite being a True Ancestor, having been burnt to near death by sunlight, a full recovery would have required substantial time and energy accordingly.

"In addition, the regeneration process was really quite a pitiful ordeal. I consider myself someone who has experienced trials and tribulations, but those days were truly unthinkable. Most contemptible of all, vultures even pecked away at me, treating me like a corpse. I never expected something like that would happen to me one day."

"Stop making me lose my appetite right before dinner! Keep those details to yourself!"

"You're the one who asked me. Surviving in that harsh environment and restoring myself anew required suffering pain and spending time accordingly."

Miraluka refuted him nonchalantly. Hisui had no choice but to change his direction of questioning.

"Then... What about recently? Since you survived and came back to town, why didn't you come over to me directly? But... Umm... From the way things looked, the class rep's doppelganger was your doing, right? And when the sports festival ended and you came to find me, couldn't you have explained everything to me directly... then come home together...?"

Although the question was rhetorical, Hisui's tone of voice was weak and did not intend to reprimand.

After all, he had almost no doubts about the woman before his eyes now.

"That time earlier, I simply wanted to see you, that's all. Although I could move about, due to the sunlight's scorching, my skin was heavily scarred and damaged, an embarrassment to show others. That was also why I was wearing clothing that covered my skin completely. I didn't want to see me in that state. However, I am now as you see here."

Showing off, she released the shoulder strap of her camisole to reveal skin as smooth as polished ivory.

"...I don't care about that kind of thing, okay? Besides, it was my fault as well."

"Don't forget that I am a woman, you know? Please do consider my feelings a bit."

She smiled seductively at him.

Even if her body were covered with wounds, surely just by using that beautiful face of hers, she could definitely establish herself in some position of value.

"...What about the class rep? Don't tell me you did it to kill time or else I'm gonna puncture you with the Tzara Blade, okay?"

"Just try if you can."

Seeing Miraluka's haughty manner, Hisui realized he had misspoken.

Yes, definitely no chance of winning.

"...Speaking of which, this is something I wanted to ask you. Back then, although I returned to Japan, I still hadn't decided whether to meet you or not."

"...Huh?"

"You're already sixteen years old. It's not like you can't live on your own. Besides, I've left you plenty of money. In that case... Not seeing you again would have been fine. I was already destroyed... That would count as a decisive farewell already."

"..."

Perhaps so.

Hisui had felt this vaguely.

In a few more years, he was going to overtake Miraluka's outward appearance in age.

He will grow old gradually while Miraluka remained eternally youthful and beautiful.

This would cause surrounding people to grow suspicious for sure.

Even if they hid from others and stayed indoors, for vampires, there were upper limits to how long they could live in one place.

Even without the sudden goodbye last time, one day, the two of them must part ways eventually.

"...However, in the end I was still worried. Whether you've returned safely to this country, whether you've entered high school... I wanted to know. Then going out of my way to visit you from afar... What the heck? Shacking up with a vampire, getting an artificial human stuck to you, getting beaten up by a dhampir, getting involved with a witch-like girl, finally even a werewolf around you. While I was gone, what on earth have you been doing?"

"...Yeah, what on earth is going on here?"

Having someone pointing it out suddenly, Hisui himself was utterly baffled too.

Although there was a vampire living in this home from a long time ago, hence resulting in his rich knowledge, Hisui almost never had actual contact with supernatural entities.

However, ever since going to high school, his experience suddenly jumped dramatically, far surpassing the level back when he was living with Miraluka.

"And I can't believe you're even getting your blood sucked by a vampire. I know your constitution best. That type of constitution has its limits. Or perhaps... That's your fetish?"

"Of course not!"

Hearing that kind of embarrassing question, Hisui felt that he must deny firmly.

"...Then I decided to protect you secretly and observe the situation first and ended up picking up that strange drug."

"That's the drug for causing doppelgangers earlier, right? You used it on the class rep, right? Why..."

"I wanted to use it on you from the start."

"What--!?"

Ignoring the shocked Hisui, Miraluka continued indifferently.

"However... Using a drug I picked up on you directly didn't seem totally appropriate. So I tested it out on a child who happened to pass by."

"You really are bored out of your mind! Come on, could you stop acting so unrestrained, okay...?"

"If any problem arose, I would have handled it immediately myself. Do you really believe that I'm unable to take care of a mere doppelganger?"

"Is that the issue here!?"

"That is the issue. And that girl is always making eyes at you. Also, she is the most normal among all the girls surrounding you. Hence, I was a little curious regarding what her hidden side was like. Although I could use the mystic eyes to interrogate her, but in order to find out her true feelings, it is still best to draw out and separate the hidden component in her heart."

"Gimme a break..."

Hisui scratched his head and recalled the past of this unruly family.

Indeed... That's the kind of person she was to begin with.

Not treating humans as mere food, she was the type of vampire that inspired respect.

Nevertheless, there was a fundamenal difference about her.

A kind of attitude that placed herself superior to humans... Refusing to be compared to them at all.

Ultimately, she and humans were different organisms, wholly incompatible. She neither took the position of overt hostility nor did she have any intention to be friends with humans. Non-aggression, non-involvement, refraining from relationships as much as possible. But when necessary, whether as adversaries or in using them, she had no scruples at all.

This gap arose from a different value system and being different species.

Hisui had almost forgotten.

Living together with Rushella had caused him to almost forget that this was a vampire's true nature.

"Then why did you want to use that kind of drug on me? When clearly you had no idea what kind of doppelganger will be born?"

"I only wanted to know whether your constitution was working normally or not. It would have been fine once I confirmed that your constitution remained even after the doppelganger was born. But constitutions with spiritual powers are apparently inconvenient to test. I never expected that your constitution would be taken by the clone. Looks like there is room for improvement."

Miraluka shook her head in a slightly solemn manner.

Her frowning face looked like that of a mother worried about her child.

She was the type of mother who would never spoil their children with excessive love nor allow their children to be in danger, the kind of mother that existed in every common family.

"Don't go turning others into experiments so recklessly! Thanks to you, I almost stopped being human...!"

"That's not my fault, but that of the imposter, isn't it? Speaking of which, without me, you would have stopped being human long ago."

"Uh, well, umm..."

Of course, Hisui had never won an argument against her.

"Although the process was a little convoluted, in the end, you recovered and the imposter has apparently left, and I have finally recovered my state. I only returned because you can't be left alone in this home. Any problems with that?"

"Tons of problems! There's so many things wrong that I don't even know where to start!"

"Then don't say anything. Besides, what right do you have to question me in this or that?"

Miraluka lay down on the sofa and retorted conceitedly.

Although she was not lifting her head high or puffing her chest out in a haughty manner, those crimson eyes were the type that belonged to supreme rulers who looked down on the foolish commoners below.

And the way those eyes looked, she was undoubtedly the family that Hisui had been living all his life together with back in the past.

"By the way, now that I'm finally home, what's with your attitude?"

"This is 90% your fault, okay? Given how we parted ways, how do you expect me to believe you?"

"True... After all, I was reborn from almost turning into dust and ash completely. To be honest, whether I am the same me from the past, whether this is my true self, I would have a tough time answering these questions. Oh Hisui, am I truly fake or authentic?"

"How would I know? Don't ask me to confirm!"

"How should I put this? It feels like those sci-fi novels that humans write where humans are transferred using matter teleportation devices, completely dissociating the body into particles then reconstructing anew. Is the teleported person the same person as before? Although it's the same body, doesn't that count as dying once? The ego residing in the body, is there any continuity with the previous ego? Or perhaps I'm simply a replica that has inherited my memories!?"

"Stop making things so complicated! Don't throw this kind of problem with no answer to a high schooler like me!"

Hearing this highly philosophical topic, Hisui retorted in full strength.

Normally acting like a vaunted queen, Miraluka would also bring up this type of annoying topic on occasion.

After all, having lived for so long, she could easily put on profound airs simply with a bit of acting.

"You told me before, right... That a vampire's destruction means "nothingnesss", without anything left behind. Since your consciousness remained, well... Then it must be your real self. And since there's no dying in the first place, resurrection is out of the question... overcoming huge difficulties, you managed to survive."

Hisui's words were meant to convince himself and comfort Miraluka.

However, he still had not accepted things in his heart and there were many things he still wanted to say.

But the person before his eyes served as evidence for everything.

That's right, she can't possibly be dead.

An immortal True Ancestor... Dying for someone so small and insignificant as him, absolutely impossible.

Hence, Hisui chose to believe.

He was willing to believe.

"Looks like you've reached a conclusion. But Hisui, haven't you forgotten something important?"

"...What?"

Miraluka stared at him silently, causing Hisui to avert his gaze involuntarily.

But her crimson eyes cannot be deceived.

Hence, Hisui gave up resisting and looked at her once more.

Gazing at her face of flawless perfection, with a bit of sulking emotions, with a bit of a tired expression, with a bit of joy on his face... A matter-of-fact greeting escaped his lips.

"Welcome home."

Miraluka had been waiting a long time for this and she smiled seductively.

"I'm back."

Today, Seidou High was having open house where parents were invited to tour and observe classes.

Facing the blackboard, the students seemed more serious than usual.

The homeroom teacher feigned composure while writing on the blackboard, stroke by stroke.

The parents sitting at the back of the classroom could be said to be the real guests of today.

As "legal guardians", the visitors were not limited to mothers.

Fathers from single-parent families, older brothers or sisters or even grandparents visiting.

That said, in Hisui's class, all the observers were female. Judging from their face and appearance, there was probably no question that they were all moms.

With one exception.

She was sitting in the center of the seating area, arms crossed, listening to the lesson seriously.

Even without applying make up, her natural beauty was not something that any mother could match up to.

Yet today, she had specially dolled herself up, even putting on a formal dress.

Her face was already the youngest among the parents, yet she still put make up meticulously and definitely overdressed a bit.

Apparently, she had some awareness of her outstanding beauty and was wearing sunglasses to cover up as a result. But honestly, that was kind of meaningless.

The boys were clearly unable to to ignore her. Even the girls kept glancing at the back from time to time, resulting in less of a learning atmosphere in the classroom than usual.

Sitting in the last row, Hisui finally reached the limits of his tolerance and turned to the woman behind him.

"...Why the heck are you here?"

Class had barely started a few minutes and Hisui was already haggard. However, Miraluka haughtily puffed her chest, emphasizing that massive bosom, and answered:

"I have arrived."

"No one asked you to!!"

Hisui's scream reverberated in the classroom. Then lowering his volume, he asked Miraluka quietly.

"Why did you come!?"

"The open house notice was on the table. Isn't that something you should show your parent/"

"...I should've thrown it away."

"What's the matter? I didn't get to attend the entrance ceremony, so I have to show up for open house at least."

"Not needed... I already said back when middle school started, you don't need to come to these kinds of events!"

"What, I remember in the first of middle school when I visited. Those male friends of yours said something like 'if I had a mom like that, it'd definitely be okay! By the way, is that your mom!? Are you sure she's not your sister!?' Did that cause you mental trauma?"

Miraluka cocked her head while digging up Hisui's dark memories.

Hisui's face went so red that it was trembling.

"I've heard that boys in puberty would always start recognizing family as members of the opposite sex. Does that refer to this? So I see it's my fault for being beautiful."

Miraluka shook her head pretentiously.

Had any other person said this, they would be undoubtedly a narcissist, but for her it was indisputable truth and difficult to refute.

A neighboring parent could not bear to watch Hisui pitifully unable to retort and interrupted:

"Excuse me... My, you sure look young. May I ask... you are Kujou-kun's...?"

That parent was unsure how to address her. Miraluka smiled cordially and took off her sunglasses.

"I am his mother."

"N-N-N-N-N-No, that's totally not true!!"

Hisui denied loudly and firmly.

Without a doubt, she played the role of the mother but it would be troubling to continue the subject.

"Hold on, Hisui, isn't a stepmother backstory acceptable?"

"Well... Hmm, I guess..."

"Eh, Kujou-kun, your parents have already passed away...?"

Hisui's neighbor, Reina, asked with worry.

This put Hisui in a dilemma.

Parents and classmates were all staring at Miraluka, trying to determine their relationship.

Miraluka openly accepted their stares and smiled seductively.

"I am his wife❤"

"OF COURSE NOT!!"

Hisui denied strongly.

Crap crap crap crap crap, super crap.

This kind of family was hopeless.

"Don't make shocking statements like that! Besides, I'm only sixteen! I can't marry yet!"

"...Then how about the fiancee or lover angle?"

"Could you find a different angle!? Also, I'm serious, could you go home!?"

"She's really an interesting person... I'm guessing that she's your relative, just like Draculea-san?"

Reina calmly observed the reactions of the surrounding people and offered her help.

Seeing her worried look, Hisui decided to run with her misconception.

"Yeah... Like that girl, because of living overseas, she's not very knowledgeable about common sense in Japan... Right?"

Hisui hastily motioned with his eyes, asking Miraluka to play along.

With an unaccepting look, Miraluka finally turned her face to the side and anwered:

"...I'm his older sister."

"Yeah... Well, let's leave it at that."

Her third answer finally turned out to be the most normal and relatively correct.

The classroom's abnormal atmosphere was finally dispelled. Homeroom teacher Horie Jyuri clapped her hands lightly to get everyone to pay attention.

"Okay, everyone please focus on the lesson. I know that you're all nervous because the moms are visiting but that's exactly why you need to pay attention to the lesson as usual. I also understand that Kujou-kun is very close with his pretty sister, but please turn your head this way."

"Yes..."

Treated and reminded as though he was an elementary schooler, Hisui had no choice but to leave Miraluka, return to his seat and face the blackboard.

"Yes, the teacher is very right. I can understand that you're nervous because I'm here, but you have to overcome yourself and try your best!"

"...Could you just leave already?"

Ignoring Hisui's pleading, Miraluka continued to stay and refused to leave.

When Jyuri asked questions to the class, she even pointed playfully at Hisui, saying "He wants to answer." Hisui ended up giving the wrong answer but she snickered in mockery.

Hence, throughout the lesson, Hisui felt like he was sitting on needles where every second was like eternity.

When the class finally ended, his suffering still continued.

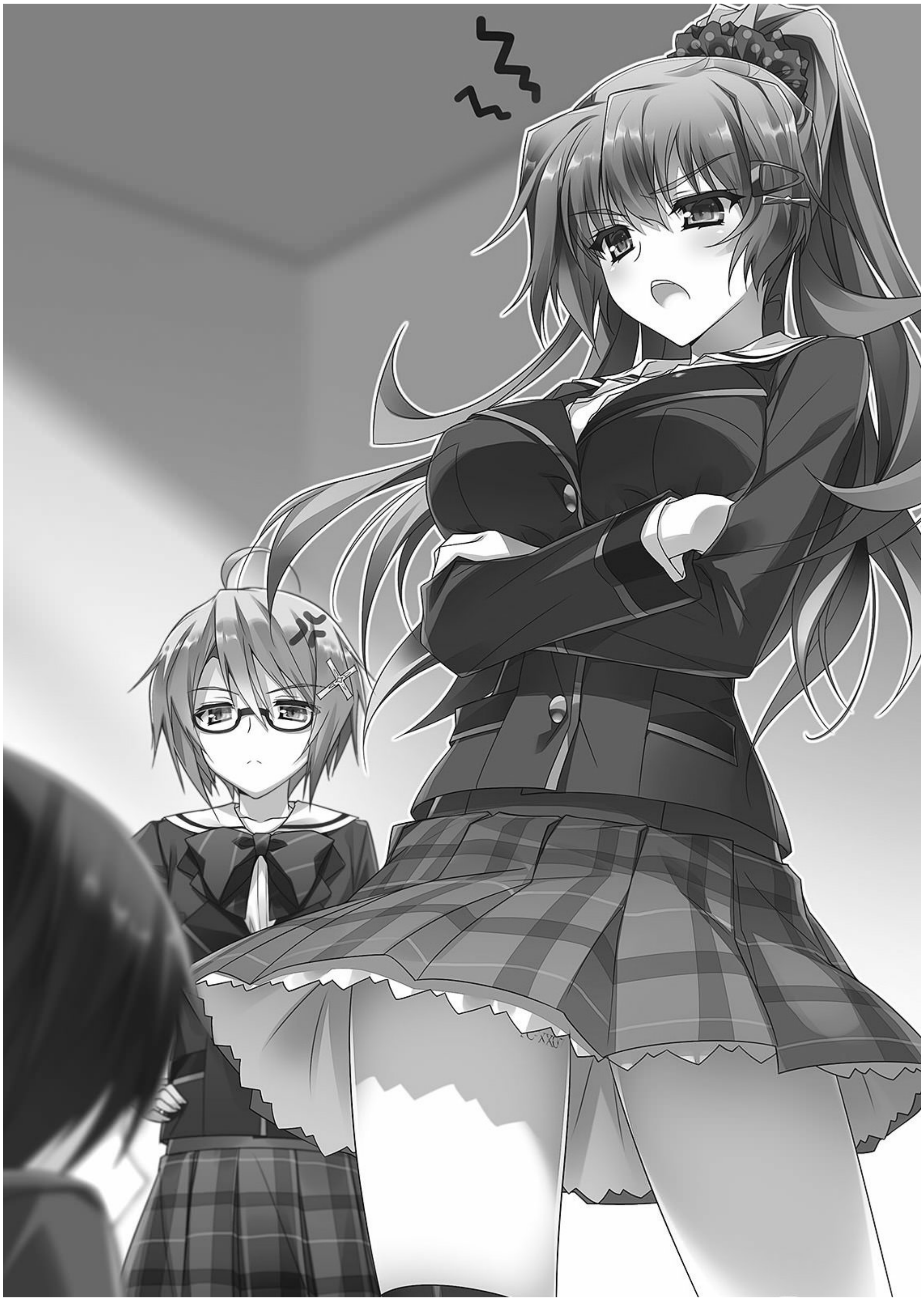
Because it was open house for the first-year parents today, after school club activities were suspended. In theory, students were all supposed to go home after lessons were over. However, a certain club yet to be authorized by the school, not even eligible to be a hobby group, was under no such restrictions.

After school, Hisui went to the same old place--the empty classroom.

But unlike usual when he would sit about lazily, he was kneeling formally on the floor in seiza posture.

Standing before him were Mei and Eruru, arms crossed, staring down at him.

Catching Hisui after school just as he intended to go home immediately, they dragged him here.



"...What exactly is going on here, Hi-kun? I can't believe you're exchanging flirtatious looks with a female other than me. Who on earth is that woman!?"

"I could not care less about who you exchange flirtatious looks with, but why did she come here? And observing classes as your legal guardian, is she treating me as air?"

While reprimanding Hisui, the two girls' attitudes were completely different, like ice and fire.

Kirika and Touko, who had not seen Miraluka in school directly, observed from behind the two girls worriedly.

"Uh, umm, well... I understand how you feel, apart from what Sudou said about flirtatious looks. Anyway, can I sit down? Lately I've been getting treated this way a lot, so my mental trauma hasn't healed yet..."

"Hi-kun... Do you understand your position?"

"Do you have the kind of constitution where you have no idea how you should speak without a point-blank gun in your face?"

Mei was grabbing Hisui with a smile while Eruru expressionlessly pointed Argentum's muzzle towards him.

Turning pale in the face, Hisui nodded hastily and gave a rough explanation of Miraluka's return.

Throughout his explanation, Mei showed an unhappy face while Eruru pondered expressionlessly. Kirika and Touko exchanged glances.

After he was done, Hisui looked apprehensively at the girls but they remained silent.

"Umm, do you have any questions?"

"...Hi-kun, you believe her just because that woman said so?"

Mei was the first to speak, hesitantly.

This was probably the foremost question in everyone's mind. Naturally, Hisui expected it too.

"Well, of course I didn't believe her immediately. Although her appearance is perfect on the surface, I was originally thinking that she might slip up if we live together for a while. However..."

"However?"

"She is without a doubt... that woman. The real thing. I've asked her many things from the past, including stuff that only the two of us would know... She answered everything correctly. And after living with her for a few days, I already understand. She is her. Even if it was someone disguised... It's a disguise that I can't tell apart from the real thing."

Hisui shook his head lightly and sighed.

Seeing his calm and determined expression, Mei did not pursue the matter any further.

"--Vampires possess resilient life force. And the life force of True Ancestors far surpass the realm of our understanding. To go even further, if that vampire named Miraluka is speaking the truth, then her regenerative power is most likely the highest among all vampires... Resurrection is not entirely impossible."

Eruru added to supplement what Hisui said.

Mei and Kirika's faces seemed to carry some lingering doubt but Eruru ignored them and continued.

"Your relationship with that vampire is none of my business. I can even say that I could not care less whether she is fake or real. Although I have objections to the series of commotions earlier where she had played a secret hand in causing... Proving her guilt is no easy task. Also, the higher-ups dare not make a move against a True Ancestor recklessly."

"Reckless action would probably end up being worse off. Well, if it does turn into an all-out war against humans, she'll still lose. But before that happens, losses will be hard to estimate. According to Miraluka, she has made an under-the-table agreement with a certain bigshot regarding non-interference and non-aggression..."

"I care not, either way. The only matter that concerns me right now is Rushella-san's whereabouts."

Hearing that, Hisui's face went grave.

Considerate of his feelings, Mei and the others did not interrupt.

"The appearance of the vampire Miraluka was accompanied by

Rushella's disappearance. You cannot possibly think that there is no link between the two, do you?"

However, Eruru's lips were merciless.

Regarding the question that everyone wished to know, she went straight for Hisui's heart and pursued to the very bottom.

"I've asked her but she said she doesn't know Rushella and has never met before."

"You think we will believe her just like that?"

"...I don't think she's lying. And there's no need to lie. She's not the type that deceives or looks for excuses... Especially towards me. There's no need to exert that kind of effort for humans since she's a vampire after all."

Hisui said gravely.

Like Eruru, it wasn't like he hadn't been thinking about the problem of Rushella.

Back when Miraluka just returned, he had already asked.

However, he did not obtain a satisfactory answer.

"Even if she is not lying, I do not think that she will reveal the truth so easily. You heard her on that day. She called Rushella an imposter. What does this word mean? That is not the way one True Ancestor addresses another, right?"

Eruru asked pointed questions one after another.

Miraluka had acutely questioned Rushella's origin that even Rushella had no idea.

"If Rushella really were a True Ancestor, then she should have met your foster mother a number of times, right? Disregarding Rushella who had lost her memories, your parent should have recognized her."

Eruru pressed the issue, allowing no silence.

Hisui shifted his gaze away and answered dejectedly.

"...I asked this too. I asked a question about the True Ancestors, a question that I had no interest in finding out all along until now."

"How interesting. Pray tell me."

Eruru sounded very polite but her attitude was actually almost like issuing a command.

Hisui sighed lightly and detailed what Miraluka had told him about the truth of True Ancestors.

"True Ancestors... numbered twelve in total. In other words, the lineages of vampires can be divided into twelve main branches. However, my parent had neither blood kin nor servants. As for the other eleven lineages, they have lost much influence and their True Ancestors are apparently all destroyed."

"...From the way it looks, it would be a contradiction if Rushella-san really were a True Ancestor. Clearly apart from your foster mother, all the other True Ancestors are gone."

"So from her standpoint, Rushella became an 'imposter.' Miraluka also said that although she didn't personally witness the demise of the other True Ancesotrs, she was acquainted with all eleven of them. Rushella is not among them. Miraluka also feels that Rushella has no blood relation with the other eleven because there's no resemblance at all."

"In that case, who on earth exactly was Rushella-san?"

Eruru used past tense.

This was only natural.

Because Rushella was no longer here.

Eruru's deliberate choice of words made Hisui feel annoyed. He could not help but respond violently.

"Who the fuck knows. An insignificant vampire who deceived a True Ancestor... There, happy now?"

"I believe that you should be the one who knows her best, right? Was she that kind of vampire?"

Eruru's every word was rocking Hisui's heart.

Hisui remained silent. The others had no idea what to say.

Just as the heavy silence occupied the classroom, the door was suddenly pulled open.

"What, so you turn out to be in this kind of place. Took me so long to find you."

"Miraluka...!"

Miraluka had arrived.

Apparently, the parent teacher conferences had ended by this time.

"What a meaningful time I had. If possible, I'd like to try joining that parent teacher association."

"Stop fucking around, can you please stop fucking around!?"

"What are you worrying about? Relax, all I need to do is stare at them and everyone does everything I say."

"Yeah, you clearly used the mystic eyes again, didn't you? You obviously used the mystic eyes!?"

Hisui could not resist his retorting habit.

But Miraluka pretended not to hear and swept her gaze across everyone in the classroom.

"Looks like the werewolf is absent but there's an extra ghost this time. How much of a monster bait is my little one here?"

"Oh hello there, I'm Fuwa Touko."

Usually floating around in a carefree manner, Touko stood still for once and greeted.

Miraluka's commanding presence compelled her to do so involuntarily.

Nevertheless--The other three girls stared at her with complicated expressions.

Confronted with hostility and suspicions, Miraluka remained unfazed, smiling and turning towards the girls.

"May I conclude... that you girls are Hisui's friends? Thank you for taking care of him on a daily basis."

Despite her polite choice of words, her tone was still haughty as ever.

After all, she had already fought with everyone here except for Touko, even if only just a brief skirmish.

Hence, Eruru was the first to act.

Stepping forward as though to protect Hisui, she faced off against Miraluka.

"I have several things to ask you. I would greatly appreciate it if you could come with me."

"What if I say no?"

Eruru answered by placing her finger on Argentum's trigger.

She was determined to shoot if necessary, a conflict was about to erupt any moment--But just before she fired a bullet, Miraluka closed in.

Then with both hands pulling on Eruru's face, she stared at her.

"W-What are you doing!?"

The unexpected move greatly surprised Eruru.

But Miraluka ignored her and continued to examine Eruru's appearance.

Finally, she nodded as though understanding something.

"You must be John's daughter, aren't you!?"

"Wha..."

Eruru was petrified. Argentum fell to the ground.

Seeing Eruru's unusual reaction, Hisui and the rest found it quite unbelievable. But Miraluka did not care.

"I knew it... I see now. Even that guy became a father. I only knew he was a lecher but never expected him to bear a child with a human."

"S-Shut up! That kind of man, that kind of man is no father of mine...!"

"What are you talking about? Your eyes are identical to his. If you really didn't resemble him, how would I have recognized it?"

"R-Rubbish...! I have no father...!!"

"Don't say something so heart-breaking. Although your father's lower body is a little unrestrained, he's quite an honest man in other regards.

Surely your father must have doted on you lovingly."

Miraluka smiled and picked up Eruru, easily lifting her by her underarms.

Then like playing with a child, she tossed Eruru into the air and caught her.

"S-Stop this now. Put me down now!"

"Don't act so distant. Your father and I could be considered old friends. He used to be infatuated with me at one point too."

"What an utterly terrible relationship that cannot be more terrible..."

Noticing Eruru's feelings, Hisui shook his head in sorrow.

It looked like he was not the only victim who suffered at Miraluka's hands.

"I found him too annoying, so I gave him a sound pummeling and left. To think he survived, how resilient of him. I almost want to revise my opinion of him."

"Like I said, I do not know that kind of man! Put me down now...!!"

"Don't act so distant. Come on, you're my old friend's child after all. Oh right, here's some change for you, or would candy be more suited to your liking?"

Miraluka finally put down Eruru, stroking her head while asking.

This was completely like the way one would treat an acquaintance's child.

Face gone all red, Eruru ran over to a corner in the classroom and crouched down on the floor.

"Hey Hi-kun... What's going on?"

"Eh, I'm not too sure either... But it looks like the father was the vampire parent. And their father-daughter relationship is terrible it seems. I never expected her secret to get exposed in this kind of situation..."

Hisui shrugged and explained with sympathy.

Eruru's identity as a dhampir was something she was the most unwilling to touch upon.

And right now, even Kirika and Touko found out.

"I've always felt that there was something special about Kariya-san, but never expected her to be a dhampir..."

"Dhampirs are the hybrid offspring of vampires and humans, right? I get it now..."

Kirika and Touko were conversing quietly.

Hisui sighed and walked over to explain things to the two of them.

Siding with Eruru whose mind was one-shotted, Mei charged at Miraluka.

"Hey hey, why the heck did you expose her mental trauma?"

"What mental trauma? It's just the truth. Trying to escape from one's roots will only bring suffering. I'm sure you ought to understand that, Frankenstein's creature?"

Identity exposed, Mei frowned with displeasure.

Although this was already an open secret, she was of course displeased when the fact was pointed out to her face.

"So what? Let me clarify first, I can be considered human already, you know? It's already decided that I will definitely have babies with Hi-kun in the future❤"

"Sorry, I refuse."

A firm line must be drawn at this point. Hisui retorted calmly.

Of course, Mei ignored him and continued:

"Also, stop trying to suddenly act like a good mother when you've clearly ignored Hi-kun and neglected him for so long, okay? Hi-kun, you already have me, so it's totally fine to let go of your mother complex, right?"

Mei puffed out her chest and emphasized as though showing off.

However, Miraluka remained unshaken, puffing out her chest and holding her head high arrogantly, causing her massive bosom to wobble.

"...Miraluka wins."

Hisui sorrowfully announced the result of the contest.

Although Mei's breasts were quite substantial, but they were only in the range of "giant" and had not reached "exploding" yet.

"...What, Hi-kun, anything goes as long as it's big enough, so you only care about size!?"

"Hey, weren't you the one who picked this fight...?"

"It can't be helped. Men are ultimately drawn to here. Back when I first adopted Hisui, he couldn't sleep unless he buried his face here."

Miraluka reminisced with deep feeling, exposing the past that Hisui was mortified to bring up.

Like Eruru earlier, this time it was Hisui's turn to be petrified.

Mei and the other girls' gazes stung painfully.

"While he was sleeping, if I put a finger into his mouth, he would even suck. Then I tried moving a breast over to him from my open neckline..."

"Stop it, don't say anymore--!!"

Hisui yelled loudly to overwhelm the remainder of Miraluka's story. That was so close... But no, it was too late already. Mei was glaring at him in resentment while Kirika and Touko were whispering to each other.

"Ultimately, Kujou-kun is unable to escape a mother's curse..."

"No helping it, Kirika-chan. Men are all matriphiliacs. But once they get used to breasts of that level, they can't turn back anymore. Mei-chan and Kirika-chan still have a shred of hope, but I guess I'm already out of the running, right?"

"No actually, shape is also very important... I've been doing these massages lately..."

"Eh, really? You're also picking your bras very selectively, right?"

"Well, a little..."

Despite the intimate girl talk going on behind him, Hisui was already utterly depressed and exhausted.

But Mei was still high in battle spirit and wanted to counterattack.

"It's nothing more than slightly larger breasts. Could you not get too full of yourself!?"

"I didn't do anything, you know?"

"Shut up!! Now is the time for an open battle for the throne of Hi-kun's legal wife, fair and square!!"

"Very well."

Miraluka readily accepted the challenge.

She looked even a little interested.

"Then... What is the contest?"

"Isn't it obvious? A lady's sport, arm wrestling!"

"How is that ladylike at all!? And it's totally catering to your own strengths!!"

Ignoring Hisui's snide remarks, Mei moved a desk and placed it in front of Miraluka. Putting her elbow on its surface, she got into a ready position.

"Okay... Bring it on!"

"I don't really mind, but are you serious? The sun has already set."

Just as Miraluka pointed out, it was already sundown.

The biological activity of vampires was beginning to liven up. Night belonged to her.

"Don't look down on others... Other areas aside, I won't lose in a pure contest of strength!!"

"I see now, then let's start. Hisui, you be the judge."

"Why me..."

Forced to be the prize and the judge without his consent, Hisui retorted unhappily.

But he also understood that resistance was futile, so he walked over to between the two of them whose hands were already firmly clasped together, then announced the beginning of the match.

"Ready... Start!"

"Watch this--!!"

Mei concentrated her entire body's power into her right arm and went all out in violent offensive at the start.

This vigor was no longer merely for pressing the back of the opponent's hand onto the desk but almost like wanting to break it--Nevertheless, Mei's arm moved in the opposite direction as though resisting her own will.

"Eh?"

Instantly, the world was turned upside down.

The back of Mei's right hand struck the desk all at once, then broke the desk into two!

The violent impact caused Mei's body to fall on the floor, falling over tragically.

Probably due to bumping her head, Mei looked a little dizzy. Miraluka looked down at her as though looking at dirt.

"I won."

"You...!"

"What a weak arm. You're lucky it didn't snap. Your ancestor was a lot stronger. Even at night, I couldn't match him in strength."

Miraluka's eyes shone with the light of reminiscence.

Speaking of Mei's ancestor, possessing monstrous strength exceeding that of vampires, there was only one candidate.

The original version of Frankenstein's creature.

"You knew him!?"

"A very long time ago, I met him once when he traveled to the north pole. Although he was very bothered by his looks, the way I see it, he was quite a good man. After all, the inside is what matters for humans. Pity that his descendants are all obsessed with decorating appearances but are only empty shells."

Miraluka looked at Mei with pity.

Mei gnashed her teeth and took out her cellphone, calling someone.

"Hey, Doc!? It's me. I want to replace my upper arm with the power-type version, right now! What, you can't? Stop making excuses and get on with it!"

"What are you doing... What the heck's with your body structure?"

"Forget that loser. It's time to go home, Hisui. I'm hungry too."

Miraluka took Hisui's hand, intending to leave.

At this moment, she met eyes with Kirika.

Seeing Kirika look like she wanted to say something, Miraluka smiled lightly.

"How is Welfica?"

"You remember Grandma...?"

Kirka knew that this True Ancestor here had interacted with her grandmother in the past.

It was truly quite surprising for a long-lived vampire to remember a measly human.

"Of course I do. You look just like her when she was young. I knew it, not sucking her blood was the right decision."

"...?"

"Otherwise, she wouldn't have been able to meet you. Oh why can humans find happiness in such short time?"

Leaving these words behind, Miraluka led Hisui out of the classroom.

Although Hisui resisted, given the overwhelming difference in strength, he was finally dragged away.

Still in the classroom, Kirika looked around her and found Eruru standing up finally, about to open up her laptop.

"Kariya-san, are you okay...?"

"...I am fine. But please do not bring up the issue of my father."

"...Yes."

"That woman... How on earth can she be restrained?"

Holding her arm, Mei walked over to Kirika and the rest. Although she had fortunately avoided fracture or dislocation, her joints were still aching like hell.

"To be honest, a frontal battle is impossible to defeat her, so let us rule that option out. Whether or not she is a fake, her power is definitely True Ancestor-class."

"You believe what Hi-kun said, Eruru-chan?"

"Since we have no idea what the real vampire named Miraluka looked like, then naturally there is no way to distinguish. Since Kujou-kun failed to find any flaws, then there is no point in trying to discern if she is fake or not. Also--"

"Also?"

"Even if she is fake, perhaps it matters not to Kujou-san already."

"...Perhaps."

With some regret, Mei quitely looked up at the ceiling.

When together with Miraluka, Hisui seemed just as happy as with Rushella--or perhaps, even more.

"Then what are you doing opening your computer?"

"Work. I originally wanted to ask Kujou-san's opinion, but his current opinion is probably biased to some extent. It would be more appropriate for us to discuss without him."

Eruru showed the screen to Mei and the others.

On it was a police report.

"What's this? Document forgery...? Blood center... Illegal...?"

Kirika was perplexed by what she read. The same went for Mei and Touko.

"According to various blood centers, a large volume of blood has been shipped out for unidentified uses recently. Whether for surgical operations or research, the volumes are too great. Although there are currently no incidents that are obviously linked, I have decided on my own for the Supernatural Investigations Section to take charge of this case."

"What's going on...? Someone selling blood? This seems to be illegal in Japan, right?"

Just as Mei pointed out, in Japan where a blood donation system was in place, extracting blood from human bodies for transactions was clearly prohibited.

However, the current situation was that the blood gathered from donors were disappearing for unknown reasons, which was different in nature from selling blood.

"What you mean is... Someone is trading blood on the black market?"

Kirika speculated, still puzzled.

Her idea seemed to hit the mark. Eruru nodded slightly.

"Half right. But it cannot be called the black market. More of a gray transaction... In the blood logistics of this country, there exists an irregular but acquiesced channels of distribution that is operated on a profit basis."

"What... It sounds so scary."

Despite being a ghost, Touko was so scared that she was shivering. If Hisui were present, insensitive as he was to maidenly hearts, he would surely make a snide remark, inviting public anger.

"What distribution channels are you talking about? It's not the one used by surgery or research, right?"

Hearing Mei's question, Eruru looked a bit reluctant to speak, frowning as she answered.

"...For vampire use."

Mei went ah and understood, covering her mouth and nodding.

After all, one of the users was right here, so it was unavoidably embarrassing.

"...Do not worry, it is the truth after all. For vampires and dhampirs, blood is essential. To obtain it via peaceful means, the only way is to extract it secretly from the transfusion blood supply. Mine is provided by the Supernatural Investigations Section but strictly speaking, this is against regulations and does not count as legitimate use. After all, the point of blood donations is not to provide food for vampires or dhampirs."

Eruru spoke in self-mockery.

As a member of the police in charge of upholding law and order, yet forced to sustain life through illegal means, it was truly ironic.

"Then that means other vampires are obtaining blood from this channel...?"

"Very likely so. Inside the country, there are many vampires that the Supernatural Investigations Section has yet to identify and keep tabs on. Supposing they live peacefully, then there must exist some sort of stable supply channels. Kujou-san's foster mother probably should have her own methods of obtaining blood, different from the Supernatural Investigation Section's. And recently the volume of blood used in unidentified purposes is too great, hence the problem became prominent."

"I understand what you mean, but it's not like we are able to solve this problem, right? Isn't this the police's job? Or is there some other reason?"

Kirika's question made a lot of sense.

Assuming it was unrelated to the school, she had no obligation to help out.

"The missing blood all vanished in Seidou City before their trails were lost. In other words, all the blood has been transported here."

" " "......!" " "

Mei, Kirika and Touko exchanged glances.

Eruru continued to bring out the core matter gravely.

"After the blood vanished, Kujou-san's foster mother immediately returned. Are these two events truly coincidental?"

Eruru's sharp gaze sought the trio's opinion.

They did not speak.

None of them were able to answer.

"Actually, it is not some kind of serious crime. Vampires wanting blood is perfectly natural--There are some who hold this view but I cannot accept things as they stand. Also, there is one more matter that is worrying."

"What?"

Touko asked adorably but the next words spoken caused her expression to freeze.

"Rushella has already gone missing for over a month. Judging from her blood intake frequency and personality, she should be reaching her limit soon."

Limit. Everyone present knew what this word meant.

It was the desire for blood, an impulse that no vampire could escape.

Once the impulse expanded beyond what self-control could suppress, vampires turned into beasts.

"But she's not retarded, right? She'll find some kind of way to get blood... Right?"

Mei asked the others, seeking agreement, but the response was not optimistic.

Actually, she already knew the answer.

In the end, was Rushella going to suck the blood of someone apart from Hisui?

"Using the mystic eyes to control someone then suck their blood, or using the mystic eyes on medical personnel to steal blood packs--There are many ways and surely she would know of them. However, being so stubborn in her preferences, whether these methods can satisfy her is another matter. If she endures stubbornly, then the worst result might happen.

Everyone remained silent.

Every one of them worried for the safety of the missing Rushella.

At the same time, there was fear and unease in their hearts.

Since losing Hisui, this stable blood provider, how was she going to obtain fresh blood?

If she obtained blood and even killed people, or joined her kind in their underhanded ways--What should be done?

These unmentionable questions crossed everyone's mind but Eruru was the only one bold enough to speak them.

"Fortunately, no corpses with teeth marks on their necks have been discovered currently, nor vampire servants. However... Everyone should prepare ourselves. Of course, if the worst situation comes up, the Supernatural Investigations Section and I will handle it instead of letting you face a difficult choice."

Eruru closed the laptop and stood up.

"...Since Rushella is not here, it is time for me to leave the school. I shall be off now."

Eruru placed her computer into her bag and left the classroom.

Seeing her leave without looking back, the remaining trio shrugged helplessly.

"Eh... So what she means is if that vampire goes on rampage, she'll handle it without troubling us?"

"Still the same as always, despite clearly being a younger year, she keeps trying to shoulder everything herself..."

"That's so true, things should be left to a senior in life like me."

" "Forget about it if it's Touko-san." "

"WHY!?"

Touko yelled angrily. Unwilling to treat her seriously, Mei and Kirika went home on their separate ways.

After all, staying in this empty classroom was uncomfortable.

The absence of the club president weighed heavily on each club member's heart.

Chapter 2 - Crimson Confusion

The night was filled with silence.

The full moon's radiance fell upon the water surface, reflecting quiet moonlight, almost seeming to dye the waves with a layer of serenity.

A retro-style western mansion was standing upright by the slightly protruding seashore while the refreshing sound of waves breaking could be heard in the distance.

This type of mansion would seem slightly comical in appearance, but it was fully-equipped hospice home.

Built intentionally by the sea, this luxurious hospice home evidently belonged to someone wealthy.

Nevertheless, its owner did not have much time left to enjoy it.

Because in her near and foreseeable future, she was fated to depart for heaven.

Presumably, the old lady understood this fact well. Sitting by the window, knitting, she watched the sea outside with a tender expression on her face.

Having lived to this day and age, she was totally at peace with the world without misgivings. No one was worth hating. Neither did she harbor any complaints towards fate. While listening to the quiet waves, she silently knitted.

A sudden visitor interrupted the quiet night.

The primitive sound of waves were playing an elegant serenade.

Seeing graceful footsteps approaching, the old lady--Welfica--smiled cordially and opened the window.

"It has been a while, vampire young lady."

Her gaze rested where the queen of the night was standing silently.

The snow-white complexion appearing in the darkness was astounding.

Crimson lips.

Crimson eyes.

Rushella Dahm Draculea.

"My granddaughter is worried about you. You disappeared suddenly, didn't you?"

Kirika's grandmother--and master in the arts of magic--had already heard about Rushella's disappearance.

Her granddaughter had asked her to relay any news back to her. Even so, Welfica had not expected Rushella to come visiting alone.

"I have something to ask you."

Keeping a certain distance from Welfica, Rushella spoke.

She seemed to have lost weight. The fatigue on her face was also quite deep.

"What is it?"

Welfica's hands continued with her task while she responded to Rushella.

Her leisurely attitude surprised Rushella a little.

"So you're willing to answer me. I was thinking you'd contact your granddaughter first."

"You would have left if I did that... Or even try to stop me, using force as well, wouldn't you?"

Realizing that Welfica had predicted her plan, Rushella had no choice but to conceal her right hand, holding her usual dagger behind her back.

"Fighting a vampire in the night would be a bit too much for these old bones. So, what would you like to ask?"

"About myself."

Rushella pointed at herself.

With the full moon behind her, the delicate-looking girl asked sorrowfully.

"Who am I?"

This question was filled with heart-wrenching pain.

This was a sense of loss originating from never possessing a personality in the first place rather than losing it.

Without any evidence to bear witness to her sense of self, Rushella's existence was so transparent, almost disappearing in the darkness of the night.

Seeing this girl who was the same age as her granddaughter, Welfica shook her head apologetically.

"I have no answer. Who you are is a question that you and the boy by your side should know, shouldn't it?"

"That woman called me an imposter."

Naturally, Rushella did not accept the cursory answer and brought up the heart-wrenching truth.

"If what she says is true, then who am I? A nameless someone pretending to be a True Ancestor? Then how does that explain emblem of fresh blood? Why don't I have memories? Why did I slumber until recently? Why--"

"Why did you encounter him. That's what you wish to ask, isn't it?"

Welfica smiled lightly

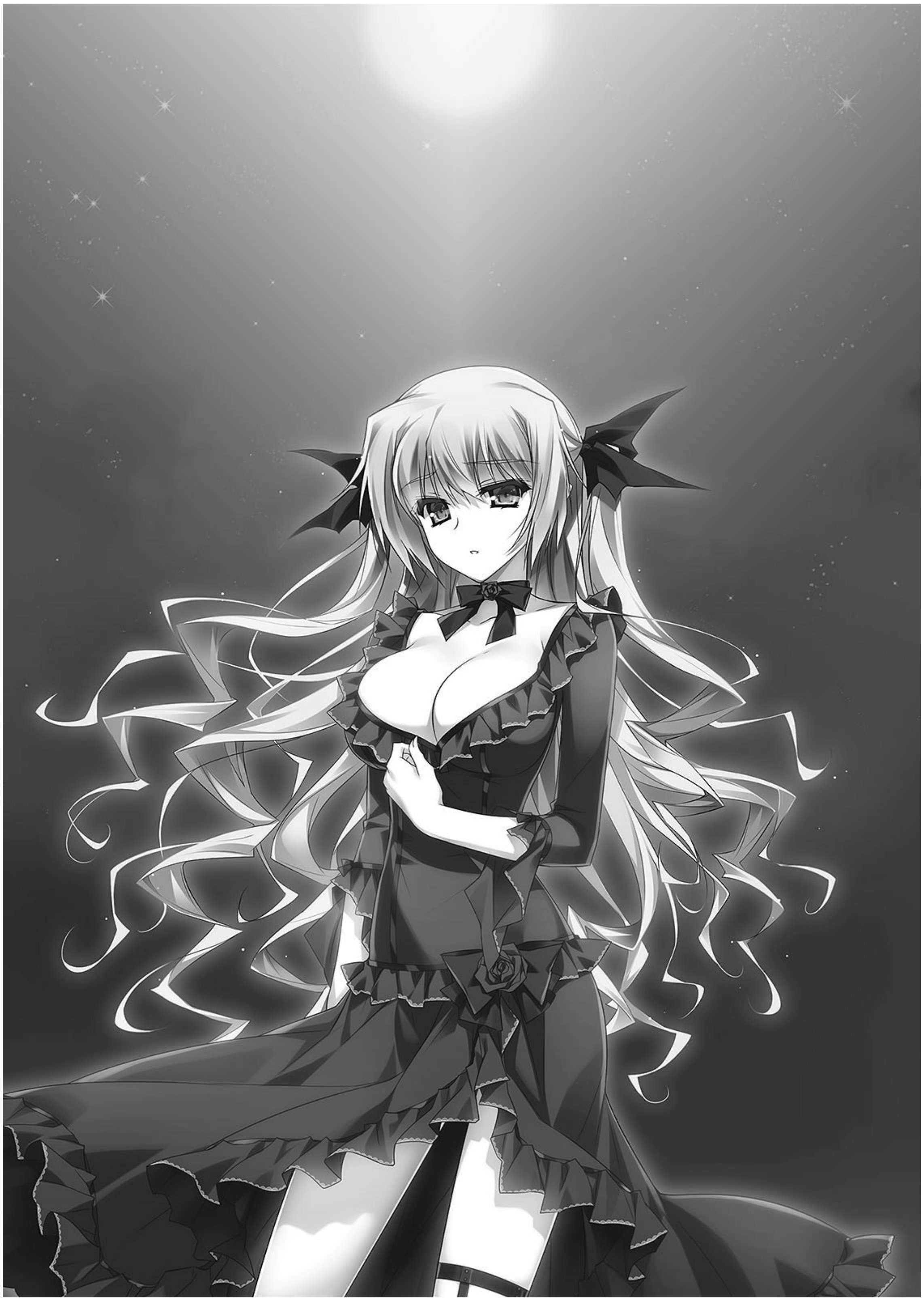
Her delightful smiling face made Rushella feel at a loss on what to do, falling silent.

But soon, she shook her head to refute Welfica's suggestion.

"Shut up... I've already forgotten him."

"Then why did you come here? If you've already cut off communications with him, then it would be best if you didn't see me."

"...Because there's no one else I can ask. I've tried searching for my origin on my own. Those whatever occult researchers and historians, I used the mystic eyes to make them talk but never got any satisfactory response. No helping it, my only choice was to come to you."



"I see. But I guess I will be disappointing you. Last time, I've already told you everything I knew."

"The True Ancestors are no longer... The final True Ancestor was Miraluka, right? In that case, who am I!?"

"Why don't you ask her directly?"

"...!"

Rushella made a conflicted look.

Indeed.

That would surely be the fastest way.

The one she should find first was Miraluka.

"I've learned from Kirika's text that she has already returned. She is currently at Kujou-kun's home... Rather, she is currently at her own home."

"..."

Rushella's face went livid.

Clenching her fists desperately, she gritted her teeth.

"I used to think that the word 'death' was the furthest thing one would associate with her... As one would expect, she is still alive. Isn't this perfect? That also gives you a reason to go back."

"Like anyone would..."

Rushella was unable to reject the notion wholly.

Welfica continued, trying to persuade her.

"Suppose I or anyone else knew about the truth of your identity and told you--Even then, you still won't find salvation."

"How would you know?"

"Anyone would know after living for so long, even if I am just a short-lived human. You simply wish to find out about your past so as to fill the void in your heart. And no matter who you are, the present will not change."

"What difference does it make if I go back?"

She murmured indifferently.

Because she had already made her decision in her heart.

If she was going to return shamelessly now that things had gotten to this point, she would not have decided to disappear in the first place.

"It'll just end up repeating the same old same old. It's better that I'm not there, especially with that woman there. We won't see each other again."

"My, how pessimistic you are. Last time I saw you, the brightness of day was exuding from all over your body, almost like you weren't a vampire."

"..."

"Follow your own choice, but do not regret it. However, you should pay a little more attention to taking care of your body, shouldn't you?"

"What are you talking about?"

Seeing Rushella play dumb, Welfica extended her left hand towards her.

There was a tiny droplet of blood on her left index finger.

This was a small wound pricked by the knitting needle she was holding under her arm.

The droplet of blood, seeping through the skin, caused a change in Rushella's eyes.

They became crimson.

Her nostrils quivered as she bared her sharp fangs.

Driven by instinct, Rushella felt compelled to approach Welfica. With great difficulty, she stopped herself, covered her nose and mouth then backed away.

"Desiring blood from even someone as old and decrepit as I am... You must be quite thirsty, evidently. I've heard from Kirika that you did not take with you the backup supplies of Kujou-kun's blood. I can't believe you really refrained from drinking the slightest drop of blood all this time?"

"..."

Rushella did not answer. Hugging herself tightly, she clutched her arms desperately, her fingernails digging deeply into her flesh, trying her hardest to control her breathing.

"You should understand. No vampire can escape the destiny of blood. Opposing your instincts will only kill your mind. Why are you so stubborn?"

"...Who knows."

Rushella finally regained her sanity. Leaving Welfica, she stood somewhere even farther away.

"Sorry for disturbing you. If possible, please don't tell Hisui and the others about my visit."

"I can't promise you that. If her friend doesn't return, Kirika will feel sad."

"..."

Rushella did not say anything more.

Turning around, she took a leap, jumping over a building and ran down the hill.

As expected of a vampire at night, that speed was extraordinary.

There was no hope in chasing after her. Contacting Hisui's group now was pointless too.

With slight sadness, Welfica watched her leave then returned to her task at hand.

The surroundings returned to silence quickly as the black night grew even darker.

Dawn was still quite far away.

"Look at that troubled face of yours. What's the matter? Something made you unhappy?"

"Why don't you ask yourself honestly? Please don't come to school again."

At the dining table, two people were sitting face to face. Hisui grumbled with a scowl on his face.

Tonight's menu included meat and potato stew, with pickled vegetables and spinach as side dishes. It had been a while since Hisui had eaten this type of traditional Japanese cuisine.

With Miraluka as the chef, needless to say, the taste was excellent--rather, to Hisui, this counted as the nostalgic flavor of everyday home cooking. No matter how much his mouth complained, the chopsticks in his hand never stopped delivering food for an instant.

Having lived for so long, this vampire's cooking skills had reached the level of master chefs. Even Japanese cooking was a piece of cake for her.

Ever since Hisui reached middle school, she had seldom cooked personally, but today was a rare occasion when she showed off after so long.

"What's wrong with a parent going to see their child's learning? High school is not compulsory education and requires tuition to be paid. In other words, the person paying has the right to know what kind of learning attitude is shown by the one who is going to school, don't you agree?"

Unable to find counterarguments against her legitimate words, Hisui's face turned even worse.

Although he had experience living on his own, this was not total independence seeng as he was enjoying the inheritance left behind by Miraluka.

It was reasonable if she were actually dead, but now that she turned out to be alive... Hisui had no words to refute her at all.

"...It really pisses me off that your cooking is so delicious."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

Hisui shut up and continued eating.

This really was a taste that brought back memories.

Only the real Miraluka was capable of making this type of taste.

Pretending to help out in the kitchen, Hisui had observed her every movement earlier. Even her experienced techniques were identical to what he had seen in the past.

Hisui was not doubting the authenticity of the person before his eyes, but he simply could not believe in her return completely.

Quite shaken, his heart felt lacking in a sense of reality.

Bit by bit, this feeling was changing the ordinary daily life the two of them were sharing together.

However.

Something was missing in his heart.

"What's the matter? You're spacing out, staring at my face."

"...Nothing. I'm full. Let me clear up."

Avoiding Miraluka's gaze, Hisui took the utensils to be washed.

Although the queen-like Miraluka was capable of cooking, she left all the other chores to Hisui.

While washing the dishes, Hisui casually asked her.

"By the way, do you really not know where Rushella went?"

"No idea. I wanted to ask you, actually. It looks like she's quite stubborn about you. Why did she just leave?"

"Who knows."

Hisui feigned calmness and answered emotionlessly.

Instead of asking face to face directly, he asked the question while engaged in other tasks so as to hide the agitation in his heart.

"Did she feel fear towards me...? I doubt it. But it is a little troublesome that she disappeared."

"What do you mean?"

"Hoh."

"...You didn't know Rushella, right? Yesterday, you even asked me how I came to know her... Is it actually possible for you to have vampires you don't know?"

"Of course. To me, all vampires are strangers apart from myself. Other True Ancestors probably feel a sense of responsibility towards their servants and descendants, but I have no family apart from you. Hence, I need not care."

Having shifted their location to the living room, in front of the television, Miraluka explained nonchalantly.

Like Hisui, she was uninterested in these topics when occupied with other tasks.

"Then... What's Rushella's identity? A vampire who isn't a True Ancestor... But she possesses the characteristics of True Ancestors you told me about. Blood stains that automatically arranges themselves into emblems, mystic eyes that can control all creation. She... Who on earth is she?"

After finishing the dishes, Hisui took off his apron and returned to the living room.

But Miraluka did not look at him.

"You're really concerned about her. While I was away, did you start having feelings for her?"

"Answer my question. Why does she, an imposter as alleged by you, share the same characteristics as a True Ancestor like you?"

"Try thinking a little on your own."

"......Hey."

Hearing that, Hisui could not help but feel anger rising in his heart, but Miraluka remained unfazed.

Perhaps because there was nothing worth watching at the moment, Miraluka switched the television off in boredom. Her eyes still glued to the dark screen, she began to speak tirelessly as though reciting a poem.

"I've always been alone, but the other True Ancestors were different. Their own bloodlines, or rather, what one would call the prosperity of the vampire race--They would regard this matter as a crucial priority. I suppose True Ancestors like these have existed. In that case, they had to consider countermeasures: how chould they maintain the rule of vampires after their destruction? Within their own blood kin, how could they nurture capable successors? They must have dedicated much thought into these issues. Otherwise, they would have sought my help then denounce me for refusing them."

"What the heck!? What did the other True Ancestors do? That vampire, Pure of the Pure, the one we fought previously, he said he wanted to ask you for a favor to revive his clan. Is this related!?"

"This is my first time hearing of it. To think you fought a Pure of the Pure and survived, as expected of my family... Rather, it was thanks to your constitution, right?"

"Either way, it's your credit, right? What now, you're starting to brag?"

Hisui retorted unhappily while Miraluka smiled faintly.

"Indeed, I'd like to brag a bit every now and then. I've raised you so well, to become such a great match for me."

Before he knew it, Miraluka was already before his eyes.

As a vampire, concealing her presence while moving was as natural as breathing. Without giving Hisui any time to react, she embraced Hisui.

"My prided son... Can I call you that? Or would it be better to call you my younger brother?"

"In terms of age, I don't even qualify as a great-grandson..."

"So noisy, shut up."

Hugging Hisui tightly, she buried his face into her excessively voluptuous bosom.

A concentrated and sweet fragrance filled his nostrils. An adult scent that other girls could not compare with at all.

Different from Rushella.

"Let go...!"

"Very well."

Unexpectedly, she released him readily... Then Miraluka brought her lips up close.

Hisui expected her to aim for his lips... But Miraluka kissed his forehead instead.

"I don't know what you're thinking, but I never did anything to that imposter. If you've got something to say, it'd be best if you voice your concerns and talk to me clearly."

"...It's not like what you think. Although I want to get to the bottom of things, if you don't know... Then forget about it."

"You believe me?"

"If I don't believe you, who would?"

Hisui answered gruffly, bringing a wry smile to Miraluka's face.

Seeing her calm and composed smile, Hisui suddenly felt the agitation in his heart rise dramatically, so he left the living room.

Arriving at his room on the second floor, he lay down on the bed and stared at the ceiling with nothing better to do.

Miraluka knew something.

She definitely knew something about Rushella's origins.

If he stubbornly questioned her, he would probably be able to get her to answer.

Nevertheless, Hisui could not do it.

Whether about Rushella's past or his suspicions against Miraluka, Hisui was unable to voice his doubts.

Even the cellphone beside him felt repulsive--He did not want to confide in Eruru and the other girls.

Why?

This series of self-questioning was making Hisui very agitated.

The fluorescent lighting overhead seemed to be annoying him on purpose. Hisui raised an arm to cover his eyes, plunging himself into darkness.

"Am I afraid?"

Muttering alone, no one answered him.

Despite the presence of the parent whom he had spent many years together and the room he had lived in for so many years, Hisui felt inexorably lonely.

In the dark basement, candle light flickered from the ancient candlesticks.

Scented candles burned quietly, filling the basement with the color and fragrance of fantasy, turning the place into a vampire's stronghold.

The table of ebony finally welcomed its true master who had disppeared for so long--Miraluka.

Late at night, past midnight, she came to the basement.

A large collection of books, wine, as well as the sacred cross sword, Tzara Blade, which slept here. This was virtually like her castle.

She usually spent her nights sleeping in the room where Rushella had stayed, but apart from that, she would always come to this place.

Holding in her hand a glass that was like a piece of high-class artwork, Miraluka unsealed a bottle of red wine from her prized collection.

A rich aroma began to spread in the basement, stronger than the smell of the scented candles, yet neither fragrance mixed with the other.

Sight, smell and taste--She immersed herself in the pleasures of the senses brought about by the fine wine while examining her own arm.

If one was fortunate enough to discover the lost arm of Venus de Milo, surely it would be the arm before her eyes--that perfect and blemish-free arm of hers would inspire such fantasies in the viewer.

Clear skin that was so pale that it would seem slightly pathological.

Anyone would feel the desire to touch her, yet fearing that her beauty might become damaged, deciding in the end to simply stare silently from afar, admiring that perfect skin which only existed in fantasy.

This skin, belonging to the pinnacle of all vampires, forbade all acts of encroachment.

There was a tiny crack in the palm of her hand.

Rather than the result of rough skin rupturing, this blemish seemed as natural as a crack in a mineral.

For a vampire who possessed absolute powers of regeneration, let alone Miraluka who stood as a True Ancestor, this type of wound was not supposed to exist in the first place.

Looking at her arm, Miraluka casually extended her hand into the white porcelain pot on the table.

Instantly, a new fragrance started spreading in the basement.

The fragrance of fresh blood.

The pot was filled with crimson blood.

Scattered in a mess around the pot were empty blood packs used for transfusions.

The volume was far too great if the blood's purpose was for slaking a vampire's thirst.

Rather than drinking it, Miraluka soaked her hand in the blood.

After a few brief seconds, she withdrew her hand.

Wiping the hand that had been covered in blood, she revealed the delicate hand of white.

Nevertheless, the wound remained.

Probably expecting this result, Miraluka did not show any gloom on her beautiful face.

Her philosophical voice simply resounded faintly in the basement.

"Just as I thought, old blood won't work eh?"

Miraluka licked the blood on her hand.

The tip of her crimson tongue, curled around her finger, looked very salacious.

Her eyes flashed with crimson light while the fangs protruding from the corners of her lips glinted coldly.

"What terrible flavor. I knew it, blood must be drunk directly."

Saying words that all vampires would agree with, Miraluka stood up.

Putting on the Inverness cape that was hanging on the wall, she departed with quick and lively footsteps.

Night was the time that belonged to her.

The queen's stroll began.

Late night--Reina was walking towards a convenience store.

Normally, this was not a time suitable for going out.

However, she happened to have trouble sleeping this night. Furthermore, drinks were out at home. In any case, due to various reasons, she had gone out tonight.

Since her parents were away from home because of work, Reina was free to go out at night.

The nearest convenience store to her home was only five minutes away on foot. There were still many pedestrians at night and there was little chance of running into crime.

Nevertheless, on this very night, the road was deserted.

The bone-chilling air stung her body, making Reina feel especially lonely.

Buying a drink at the convenience store, she quickly turned back to head home.

But along the way, a tall shadow passed her, brushing shoulder to shoulder.

"Oh my."

The other person noticed her first and stopped, turning around.

Hearing someone call out to her, Reina looked back as well.

She could still remember that beautiful face.

She had seen her just earlier today during the school's open house. Hisui's--most likely Hisui's distant relative.

But encountering her at night, she gave off a completely different impression compared to the daytime. Her seductiveness was a whole level higher.

The invisible pressure given off from all over her body was making

Reina back away.

"..."

Tripping slightly, Reina almost fell over.

She reached out to support herself against the concrete wall on her right, thus managing to maintain balance. But unluckily, there happened to be a small crack on the wall. The sharp concrete sliced through the skin of her palm, causing bleeding.

"..."

Even a dog would have difficulty detecting it, perhaps this could not even be called the smell of blood at all.

Nevertheless, the woman before her eyes smelled it.

Crimson light flashing in her eyes, she walked over.

"Are you okay?"

Smiling, she extended her slender arm of porcelain. But instead of looking at Reina's hand, the woman's eyes were staring at the drop of fresh blood.

Licking her crimson lips openly, clearly with ulterior motives, she approached Reina.

"I can tell from just the smell... You are a virgin. Please give a little of your blood to me."

Despite the polite language, her tone of voice was akin to a command.

Reina's entire body froze, too scared to move an inch.

Gazed at by those crimson eyes, her body felt rooted to the spot.

However, Reina had some recollection of that gaze.

Those eyes were a little similar to Rushella's... No, it was before that. Missing in her memories, the scene that happened the night before the sports festival.

No, tracing back even earlier--It was the first day of school when she saw Hisui for the first time.

At the time, she was also in this kind of dark environment, looking back because someone called her, then--

The terrifying past surfaced faintly in her mind, then disappeared like the rupturing of a soap bubble.

The chaotic memories confused her consciousness, preventing her from noticing the woman in front of her who had wiped the droplet of blood from her finger and approached her wound.

Like a gentleman, this beuaty picked up the young maiden's hand reverently, bringing her lips to it.

Before such a salacious scene could be actualized, it was interrupted by yet another adorable intruder.

"This ends here."

Miraluka turned around to see Eruru standing there with a solemn expression.

"Kariya... -san...?"

Reina mumbled in daze.

Still scowling, Eruru urged her to hurry home.

"Girls should not be going out alone at this hour. Hurry home now."

Although these words applied to herself just as well, Eruru's tone of voice did not allow for any talking back.

Still hesitating, Reina remained rooted to the spot.

She was totally lost about the situation, but the dark noise originating from past memories was sounding in her heart.

Unwilling to get Eruru caught up, this thought occurred to her.

"Umm..."

"Hurry!"

Eruru shouted forcefully, making Reina swallow the rest of her words.

The classmate and another classmate's parent--Reina looked worriedly at the two who were facing off, then bowed and quickly took her leave.

As soon as Reina was out of sight, Eruru aimed Argentum unerringly at Miraluka.

"Why have you taken out such a scary toy? Did I do something?"

"There is no mercy for vampires who are about to suck human blood."

"I was not thinking of drinking her blood."

Avoiding Eruru, Miraluka secretly brought the back of her hand which had wiped Reina's blood to where her skin was cracked.

Like parched earth absorbing moisture, the droplet of blood was rapidly sucked into the skin, seeping into the crack in her palm.

The skin instantly recovered its flawlessness, but this only lasted for a brief instant. Once the blood dried, the crack resurfaced once more.

"Even fresh blood from a virgin is not enough huh?"

"...What is the meaning of this? I knew it, you cannot go against your vampire nature and you are especially obsessed with a pure virgin's blood, is that it?"

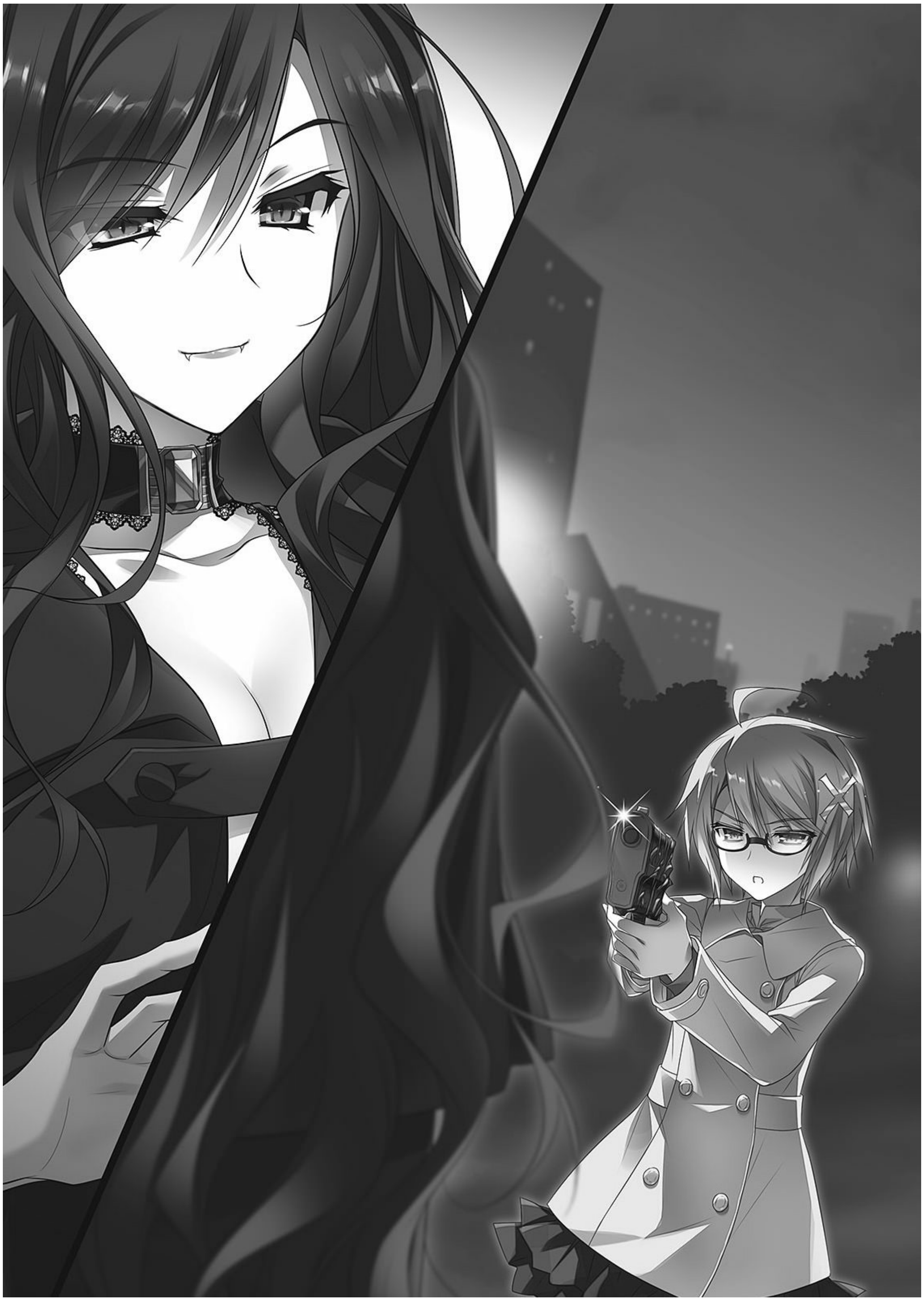
"If you're talking about preferences, I prefer male blood. Furthermore, it is the blood of a valorous hero or one who is about to die. Free of lingering attachments, the taste is very special."

"How filthy. Ultimately, you are nothing more than a vampire."

"That's not something I want to hear from you, John's daughter."

Murderous intent instantly burned in Eruru's eyes. She increased the pressure of her finger against the trigger.

"Please do not mention that name before me ever again...!"



"One cannot change one's nature, just like me. Speaking of which, encountering you here cannot be coincidence, could it..."

"I have come to question you about the situation because you have become increasingly suspicious. You have been collecting large volumes of blood, haven't you? The amount is far too large for a vampire's thirst. Since you like fresh blood so much, it is unlikely that you would store up so much all at once. What is your goal? Also, why did you return?"

Eruru carefully judged the distance between them while firing off her questions.

Even though the opponent was a True Ancestor, a shot through the head or heart by a silver bullet would still produce a critical wound.

But it would be useless if she dodged.

The threat of a silver bullet was enough to intimidate or pin down an average vampire, but given Miraluka as an opponent, Eruru could not possibly withdraw unscathed without a one-shot kill.

"Do I need a reason to return? What's wrong with coming home? And what's so strange about a vampire desiring fresh blood?"

"I am not so naive that I would accept everything you and Kujou-san say at face value. The return of a vampire who should have perished... I see, this is not rare at all. But for you to return even when that Kujou-san firmly believed in your destruction, that is impossible. Who on earth are you?"

"My, you really trust my little one, don't you?"

"...!"

Eruru went red in the face.

Miraluka smiled and continued.

"Hisui said I was destroyed and you believed him. But when I return, you suspect me. And now, you're pointing your gun at me. Why is that, little girl? Even if I'm an imposter, what do you gain by shooting me with your gun? Who are you doing this for, little girl?"

"Shut up...!"

Eruru pulled the trigger.

The bullet's slightly deviating trajectory reflected her inner turmoil.

The high-speed bullet still shot towards Miraluka's brow between the eyes.

But did not hit.

Without dodging, Miraluka casually raised her right hand in front of her, effortlessly dissipating the bullet's power with a simple clench, easily catching the bullet.

"Good skills. Looks like there's some merit to the idea that dhampirs make the best vampire hunters."

"That is merely superstition. Making up plausible-sounding reasons to dump this filthy line of work naturally on those with filthy blood flowing in their veins...!"

"In that case, for whom do you fight? Even when scorned by the populace, will you stand on the side of humans? Or perhaps, right now... You are fighting for that boy?"

"Shut up!!"

Eruru lifted her right hand, trying to follow up with another attack but Miraluka reached out with her left hand and grabbed her as though trying to crush Eruru's hand together with the gun's grip.

Without showing any fear, Eruru pulled the trigger at the same time.

But the result was the same. Even firing at point-blank range, the bullet was still stopped by Miraluka's right hand.

"Splendid skills indeed. This time, you aimed at the heart without hesitation. You have steeled your heart to destroy me, however--"

"'You must be dreaming if you want to pit these third-rate abilities against a True Ancestor'... Is that what you want to say? That would really resemble an evil villain's lines."

"Evil, you say? Is it a crime for vampires to desire fresh blood?"

"What are you trying to do to Sera-san this time!?"

"Nothing. I just happened to enounter a young virgin and wanted to test the effectiveness of her blood. That's all."

Miraluka answered nonchalantly.

Eruru frowned and re-appriased her behavior.

An inexplicably large volume of blood. It would be too much if used as a food source.

Then for what purpose?

Testing the effectiveness of blood?

For what?

Apart from drinking, what other purpose would a vampire have for blood?

From her standpoint as a dhampir, Eruru pondered Miraluka's purpose. Normally, she would never try to think in this manner.

But before she could reach a conclusion, it was Miraluka's turn to ask.

"Where is that vampire called Rushella?"

"Why are you asking that? I knew it, her disappearance has something to do with you!?"

"Are you worrying about a vampire?"

Miraluka fired her question, unable to suppress the mocking smile on her face.

Eruru did not expect herself to say something like that. Despite feeling awkward, she still continued her questioning.

"Hurry and answer my question. Why are you curious about her...? And what exactly are her origins!?"

"I've said it before, she's an imposter. But right now, I'd like to locate her to test something. A backup candidate does count as an option."

"...!?"

Eruru reflexively exerted more pressure on the trigger under her finger.

Miraluka's left hand continued to keep a deathly grip on her.

This massive strength gave Eruru no choice but to grit her teeth in a grimace. Miraluka's force was reaching deep into her bones.

Even so, Eruru desperately tried to pull the trigger. At the same time, Miraluka sprang into action.

With her four fingers together, the thrust of her sharp nails flashed coldly.

The handgun and the sharp nails, the weapons for inflicting deadly wounds crossed and passed by each other.

Nevertheless, a lazy voice stopped this melee exchange.

"Stop it."

The two girls looked up at the sound.

Hisui was standing before them.

Dressed in pajamas, he had left the house with only a jacket thrown on top.

Exhaling white breath, Hisui was standing in the bone-chilling air under the night sky.

"I can't believe you're not embarrassed to be fighting in the streets despite your age. Stop making trouble for the neighbors."

Although his tone of voice was weak and lazy as usual, Hisui's face was serious.

Seeing his classmate in a fight against the foster parent who had raised him, he could not stand by and do nothing.

"Loitering out at night isn't something you should be doing. Watch out or you'll be arrested to be re-educated."

"Do you have any right to say that? Aren't you the one who kept taking me out on walks every day when I was young? Also, let go of her now. As a great True Ancestor, stop lowering yourself to the level of a dhampir child's, okay?"

Faced with Miraluka, Hisui did not back down at all.

Getting lectured by her was a daily occurrence for him so he could not leave Eruru alone.

Even when he had no chance of winning.

"Why did you come here? Isn't it perfectly common for me to go out at night? I can't believe you followed me on purpose. I still remember how you ran into the streets, crying, looking for me because you were too lonely at night when you were small. Ever since that, this must be the first time."

"...Don't just casually reveal my embarrassing past! Any child would get scared if they woke up to find themselves alone in the middle of the night! Come on, hurry and let go. Eruru, you too, stop pointing that scary thing at my family."

Eruru did not compromise even after hearing Hisui's advice.

"She was trying to drink Sera-san's blood. You are the one who should keep her on a tighter leash. Do not let your scary family roam outside."

"...Is what she said true?"

Hisui threw the question at Miraluka with partial skepticism.

Miraluka simply answered nonchalantly in leisure.

"I admit that I'm interested in the taste of blood, but I won't drink from the girl who sits next to you in class. I simply borrowed a bit of blood and she was already bleeding beforehand. You can check her wound if you don't believe me."

"...What she said. A bite is definitely a no-no, but there's no problem if she only sucked a bit of blood that flowed out, right? Although it looks a bit unsightly. By the way, bleeding will stop faster if the wound gets licked by a vampire. It's the same principle why bite wounds on the neck don't bleed."

"None of these facts are relevant! Whose side are you on, anyway!?"

Eruru frantically covered her mouth with her left hand after these words escaped her lips.

Such words were not meant to be said.

Choosing between her and his foster mother, she should not be forcing him to make such a decision.

Also, treating Hisui as a friend, treating Hisui as support--She had never considered any of that before.

However, Hisui ignored Eruru's accusations and lazily scratched his head, answering indifferently.

"If anything, I'm standing on the same side as you both. But it's really annoying that you're fighting in the street. As the saying goes, you can't clap with one hand. Both of you deserve to be punished."

Hisui sighed again and raised in front of him the object he had been carrying on his back.

With an absolute sense of weight, he stabbed its sharp tip into the ground.

The sacred cross sword, Tzara Blade.

To avoid attracting attention, he had wrapped it in a cloth. But Miraluka and Eruru instantly noticed the sacred sword's true identity from its cross-shaped form.

Despite the massive differences between vampires and dhampirs, this was a sure-kill weapon that could neutralize their regenerative powers, even capable of causing instant death.

"You're both afraid of this, right? I don't even need to use it as a blade. If you want to gaze on its appearance or listen to its sound, feel free to continue."

Stroking the cloth covering the Tzara Blade's surface, Hisui formed a fist with his other hand.

Exposing the cross' full form would definitely stun the two of them. At least, it would make them stop fighting.

Even if they closed their eyes to avoid the sight, he could use the cross as a tuning fork by striking it with his fist to produce resonance. Its destructive power would be equivalent to a choir singing hymns in a vampire's ear.

No matter what, he was definitely able to stop the fight.

Assuming Hisui put his threats into action.

The two of them had bodies far surpassing humans. They could close the distance effortlessly to stop Hisui.

However, doing so would expose themselves to attacks from the other opponent.

The trio restrained one another, frozen and unmoving.

In this tense stalemate, the senior Miraluka was the first to compromise.

"What a skirt-chaser. Forget about the imposter, I can't believe you even fell for a dhampir. I don't recall teaching such a child."

"Stop making misleading statements. Besides, I wouldn't have gotten involved with vampires and dhampirs if I wasn't raised by you in the first place."

Miraluka scoffed unhappily in response and withdrew from Eruru's side.

"I'm not coming home for the next few days. No need to cook for me."

"..."

Without answer, Hisui walked towards Eruru. This was for protecting her, as well as to prevent her from giving unnecessary chase.

Miraluka turned and her outline melded into the darkness of the night with a flutter of her cape.

Eruru wanted to chase her but Hisui reached out and grabbed her.

"Don't follow. You can't win."

"My bullets work. You saw how her right hand was scorched."

"Yeah."

Hisui's face darkened.

Admittedly, before Miraluka left, he had noticed the unusual state of her palm.

Judging from the situation, Hisui instantly deduced that she had stopped a bullet with her hand.

Since she had used her hand to block a scorching bullet, suffering a certain level of burns was only natural. Furthermore, this was a silver bullet. Apart from the pure heat, it was also supposed to produce searing pain for vampires.

"...But she blocked it, right? What can you do to an opponent that can stop bullets with her bare hands? You're absolutely not winning in a fight like this."

Although a dhampir's physical abilities far surpassed that of humans, they were still a far cry from a pure vampire's.

If the vampire parent was of a much higher class than that of the enemy vampire, there might be a chance if the dhampir went all-out. But against a True Ancestor at night, hopes for victory would be far too faint.

"Then you are able to defeat her? Using that sword of yours to pierce her heart or chop off her head, perhaps there is a chance for victory. But are you capable of doing that?"

"...Why do I have to do something so bloody?"

Hisui avoided answering and pondered Miraluka's actions tonight.

"By the way, why are you here? Did someone warn you in a dream?"

"I couldn't sleep so I went downstairs, then I smelled blood. Going into the basement for a look, I discovered that she was gone, leaving a pot filled with blood. The blood was too much to drink and besides, she doesn't drink blood like that either. Finding things weird, I came out to find her. Just to be safe, I brought the Tzara Blade so things turned out this way. What the heck happened?"

"I already told you. She simply wanted some virgin blood on a whim... That does not seem right either. Also..."

"Also?"

Also, she had asked for Rushella's whereabouts. But for some reason, Eruru could not bring herself to mention this.

Furthermore, the fact that she was investigating Miraluka about the matter of the large volumes of blood delivered to this town--She did not want to mention this to Hisui either.

"N-Nothing. In any case, if she tries to drink human blood again, I will shoot. Please do not interfere."

"..."

"You... Come and stand on the side of humans."

While Hisui remained silent with a solemn look, Eruru added without looking at him.

"So thirsty."

Alone in some ruins, she murmured emptily.

Her face was filled with deep fatigue.

This was hardly unexpected. After all, she had not drunk blood for over a month already.

Sitting on a decrepit chair, she bowed her head.

She looked like a lost lamb, praying in contrition for God's forgiveness.

A vampire repenting would be a joke, but considering the location, it might be appropriate after all.

Rushella's current hideout used to be a church where people prayed to God.

Although she had decided to leave Seidou City, she did not want to go too far.

Lingering attachments were perhaps part of the reason. Furthermore, she felt that the key to her mysterious origins definitely lay somewhere near the place where she awakened.

Hence, she decided to station herself at a neighboring town in the outskirts of Seidou City.

She had to avoid people as much as possible to prevent Hisui and the others from discovering her. A suitable hiding spot had to shelter her from direct sunlight during the day. In the end, Rushella chose to stay here.

No one would expect a vampire to hide in a church.

Sacred grounds would repel monsters in the first place.

In the beginning, Rushella felt repelled by this place too but after actually arriving, she found it to be a quiet and peaceful place.

This place had been abandoned for a long time. Sacred symbols like crosses and Madonna statues had long been moved away. Added to the fact that people rarely frequented this place, it was an ideal hiding spot.

Dark during the day, this place even had a basement.

Hence, Rushella did not hesitate and hid her conspicuous coffin in the basement, using this place as her lair while starting to investigate her origins.

Nevertheless, she found nothing.

In fact, she had already done everything she could with Hisui.

After encountering Eruru, they had even borrowed the Supernatural Investigations Section's power.

Even then, they came up with nothing.

Furthermore, Rushella was not devoting her full effort.

She did not dare go out.

Rather than fearing sunlight, she feared meeting humans.

The irrepressible urge to drink blood was making her afraid.

A week after leaving Hisui, an intense "desire" had surged from within her body.

It was a desire that filled one with throat-tearing madness.

As a result, she almost spent the entire day hiding in her coffin, getting used to that desire. However, there also seemed to be something dark seething and turning inside her body.

Once she discovered this fact, she did not dare go outside.

Hiding all day in her coffin, she forced herself to sleep.

Actually, had she the intention, obtaining blood was nothing hard.

Just by using the mystic eyes, she could drink blood without biting personally.

But for some reason, she was unwilling.

Whenever the thought came to her, Hisui's face would always surface in her mind.

The Hisui in her mind did not show signs of reprimand in his expression, but sadness instead.

This hindered her from using the mystic eyes. Rushella had no choice but to give up on the idea.

In the end, all she managed to do was take a shower at a nearby net cafe.

Also, all she used the mystic eyes for was skipping over the registration. She still paid properly.

She did this because she could not help but recall Hisui's words--You must follow the rules and pay properly.

But this meant that the money she had brought was dwindling.

She had taken all the leftover cash from exchanging some of her gold coins, but the remainder of the coins were left at Hisui's home. She was almost penniless now.

Rushella knew what this meant in terms of survival in human society.

"...I guess I'll need to take a job."

She murmured to herself, but no one gave a witty retort.

If Hisui or Mei heard her, surely they would say: "That's not going to work for you" or "You'll end up causing more trouble than helping, don't."

"H-Hmph! Why must I do something so lowly!? I-I am the existence that humans ought to be making offerings to. This pittance of money, go earn it yourself with your blood and sweat!"

Even though there was no one making jabs at her, she spoke these words on her own.

"You"--Hisui was clearly not here.

Her view suddenly grew blurry.

In order to prevent the surging tears from falling, Rushella desperately wiped her eyes with the back of her hand.

Finally, she sighed, got up and went out, repeating her everyday aimless walk.

It was almost sundown so she need not fear sunlight.

Walking blankly in a circle, she reached a well-stocked shopping street.

This place was lively and prosperous. The Christmas decorations were exceptionally striking.

Although it was still some days away, Christmas sales had already begun.

"Christmas huh..."

This was a taboo day of danger for vampires. Hiding the whole day at home would be the wise choice.

But according to what Hisui had said, that only applied to European cities where devout faith was still present. In Japan, there was supposedly no danger as long as vampires stayed away from proper churches.

Hisui had said that the people walking in the streets on that day were like him, caring nothing about celebrating the birth of God's son. Christmas was nothing more than an excuse for couples to get intimate.

According to Hisui, his foster mother would receive this day solemnly, even urging Hisui to hurry and find a girlfriend to spend a passionate night together. When Hisui was bringing up this subject, Rushella had slapped him for some unknown reason.

"Hmph, show-offs."

Rushella cursed the couple from the past.

Their discussion on Christmas arrangements had made her very displeased.

Hisui... What were his plans?

This year, he was no longer alone. Was he going to spend a happy holiday as a couple?

Clenching her fist, Rushella continued to walk aimlessly in the street under the night sky.

She did not stop walking.

Searching for the place she belonged, whose location was unknown.

"Even the witch has nothing... Then there's only that person left."

Rushella pursed her lips and entrusted everything to a tiny hope.

The rare few who knew abou the truth of the True Ancestors.

The Pure of the Pure vampire whose power was only second to the True Ancestors.

That guy was probably still imprisoned at the Supernatural Investigations Section.

Pure of the Pure--Fergus von Blitz.

Clenching her fist, Rushella decided to pay him a visit.

Chapter 3 - Crimson Rampage

"I don't recall authorizing your friends to take part in the interrogation?"

Oogami Rangetsu looked at Mei and Kirika who were following after Eruru and questioned with displeasure.

Kasumigaseki district--The Metropolitan Police Department.

At the Supernatural Investigations Section's headquarters, deep inside the MPD, Eruru and Rangetsu were facing off.

Saturday afternoon, Rangetsu found her generally uncooperative colleague taking the initiative to bow down to her and request permission to interrogate the suspect under custody.

Eruru had interrogated him before and the suspect was currently Rangetsu's responsibility.

Seeing Eruru's firm and pleading attitude, Rangetsu felt curious and approved the request, but did not expect her to bring unrelated personnel along.

"Sudou-san I can understand, but that high school student has nothing to do with this case, right? If you want work experience, go look somewhere else."

"Uno-san is here because I have a request for her afterwards. I will interrogate the vampire alone. That will be fine, yes?"

"Very well, don't get any funny ideas, okay?"

"I am having trouble understanding you. Is there any problem with my interrogating him?"

"...Right. By the way, is Kujou-kun okay?"

This was not only a greeting but also an attempt to get information.

Rangetsu had already received news that Rushella had run away from home and a new vampire had appeared--rather, returned--by Hisui's side.

She wanted to see how Eruru would react to this.

Nevertheless, Eruru did not even twitch an eyebrow.

"Who knows, no one has bitten or drunk his blood recently. Probably lively as ever. How about you try going on a date with him?"

"W-What did you say!?"

Rangetsu denied verbally but her face went red.

Eruru smirked and continued.

"By the way, he mentioned earlier he would like to go for some barbecue. You ought to know a good place, right?"

This was precisely Rangetsu's area of expertise. She instantly brightened up with a smile.

"Eh... Really? T-Then allow me, the barbecue expert at the MPD, to personally take him out...!"

"Just kidding. What are you getting excited about? What an idiot."

"W-Who are you calling an idiot!?"

"I am talking about you, the kind of person who gets worked up over a high schooler. Is there any need to wave your arms around like that? What a waste of energy."

"O-On what basis do you assert this as a waste of energy!? Besides, what right do you have to criticize me!?"

Hearing Rangetsu say that, Eruru instantly frowned.

She really looked like she was angered.

"...Do not compare me with you. I feel nothing about that kind of person."

"Oh really~? I never said explicitly it was Kujou-kun, you know~?"

"...I never said I was talking about Kujou-san either."

"Then who are you talking about?"

Invisible sparks erupted between the two of them.

However, the conflict died down instantly. After all, this was a police station. The two of them quickly stabilized their emotions. Rangetsu unhappily turned her face away.

"Hurry and do what you need to do. Just in case, I will be in the adjacent room. You two, just find somewhere to sit for now."

Rangetsu asked Mei and Kirika to sit down while motioning with her eyes for Eruru to hurry.

Eruru bowed and set off deeper underground.

Rangetsu accompanied her while Mei and Kirika stayed where they were, sitting on a sofa for visitors.

"So... Senpai, did you run into her after that?"

"No, but Grandma saw her once. Judging from what she said, Rushella-san probably will not visit again. In the end, no one knows anything about what she wants to find out..."

Kirika sighed with sympathy.

She had come to seek Eruru today became she wanted to discuss the matter of Rushella visiting her grandmother.

After Kirika's grandmother saw Rushella, she only told one person--Kirika.

You decide what should be done--Entrusted with this heavy responsibility, Kirika decided to tell only Eruru and Mei.

"But Senpai, why didn't you tell Hi-kun? Surely he's the one who's worrying the most about Rushella. Also, what Rushella wants to know... Hi-kun's foster mother should know something, right?"

"That is what I initially thought... But later on, I began to hesitate. Of course, this might perhaps be due to my own selfishness."

Kirika smiled with some level of self-mockery.

Hisui and Rushella parting ways was to her benefit in various ways.

Although it was after much thinking that she finally decided not to tell Hisui, undeniably, part of it came from her feelings as a girl.

"It's very normal, right? Seizing the opportunity to console a guy's broken heart, it's commonplace throughout history. Also, if you really wanted to steal Hi-kun's heart away, then you wouldn't have told us either, right? I think you're quite a great girl for trying to handle this matter discreetly without hurting Hi-kun, you know? Almost as good as me, but not quite."

Mei proudly puffed out her voluptuous chest and leaned back on the sofa.

Kirika smiled wryly while staring at the corridor where Eruru had left.

Currently, all hope was entrusted to that petite girl.

Naturally, she hoped that Hisui's mental scars could heal while at the same time, Rushella could find salvation.

Eruru and Rangetsu walked along the heavily guarded quarantine corridor.

One of the purposes of this underground facility was isolation from the external world. In the absolute worst case, it was possible to cut off all contact with outside, forming a completely sealed space.

Due to a certain incident, the defenses here were strengthened further. In addition, a substantial increase in manpower was devoted towards security.

After multiple layers of verification through ID card checking, fingerprint and retinal scans, Eruru arrived at the lowest level of the MPD.

"Please enter on your own from this point onwards. I could accompany you, but you'd prefer to be alone, right?"

"...Thanks."

"The security camera is already turned off. Pull the alarm if anything happens... Well, I don't suppose you need more of my nagging, do you?"

"You are truly considerate in your preparations. You do know that I have nothing to repay your favor, don't you?"

"I never expected anything in the first place. Besides, Kujou-kun would be the one I'd want to be indebted to me, not you."

Eruru tensed her face in displeasure.

She never expected to conceal the purpose of her visit in the first place. After all, Rangetsu had inherited the blood of werewolves, she possessed an excellent sense of smell.

"In any case, you're here for Kujou-kun's sake, right? Coming all this way to interrogate a vampire, surely it must be related to that arrogant child, right? What a nice person you are."

"...This is only part of work."

Eruru bowed at Rangetsu then continued on her way.

Made from alloyed armor, the heavy walls of steel parted left and right, presenting the path towards the dark cell in front of her eyes.

The deepest part of the MPD served as a prison.

As an investigations agency, the MPD possessed facilities for detaining suspects to begin with and had no need to set up a specialized facility for detaining those who were already condemned.

However, the cases under the Supernatural Investigations Section were exceptions.

Very often, the suspects here were not even human. Let alone sentencing them to jail, it was impossible to punish them with ordinary laws.

Hence, before cases were completely resolved, "people" who had yet to be dealt with were locked away in this maximum security prison at the deepest part of the MPD.

But once cases were resolved, these "people" who were not protected by laws in the first place could very well be disposed of any time.

Their life and death depended on the overall judgment of the higher-ups and the final results were only known to a fraction of the Supernatural Investigations Section. It was top secret.

Even Eruru had no idea what was the final fate of the majority of imprisoned monsters who were involved in cases.

Nevertheless, she believed with certainty that the criminal she was about to confront would be kept alive for the long term.

Although there was ironclad evidence for his crimes and he would undoubtedly face the death penalty were he human, he was precious specimen after all and would not be disposed of so easily.

Normally, Eruru would have petitioned her superiors for speedy execution, but this time was different.

There were still things to ask him.

"Long time no see, Fergus."

The young man was leaning his back against the wall lethargically when Eruru spoke to him.

No response.

Rather, perhaps he did not even have the energy to reply.

He had fought a battle against Hisui and lost utterly, ending up with holy water fusing with his body on a particle level.

Due to metabolism, the holy water would be expelled from the body in the end, but the power of its holy properties, naturally antagonistic towards his body, caused scorching pain to every one of his cells, still tormenting him to this day.

In addition, imprisoned here to suffer harsh interrogation, this was undoubtedly hell for a vampire.

After a series of interrogations, he was tied up using silver chains with scripture carved on them, preventing his body from moving freely.

While he was leaning against the wall, chains secured to the wall had his wrists locked up, restraining him this moment by the power of the sacred.

"I have something to ask you. Can you speak?"

Eruru spoke indifferently without any expression on her face.

The blond young man still kept his head down, not moving.

His pale body was very skinny, clearly malnourished.

"If transfusion blood packs are good enough, I could prepare some for you? It would be a problem for me if your brain cannot work a little."

Eruru said reluctantly.

Using blood as temptation was the most taboo method from her standpoint. If Fergus took the bait, it would only further remind her of her own cursed bloodline.

But right now, every second mattered.

She had to get information out of this man, at any cost.

Fergus seemed to react to the word "blood" and looked up.

Originally a pale and handsome face, exemplifying vampire style, he now looked like he had aged twenty years.

The injuries suffered in the battle against Hisui combined with the hardship of prison had tormented his body and mind. Fergus' face was carved with the wrinkles called pain, all covered in scars.

"...It's you. Accursed taboo child. Never would I have expected myself to fall so low as to be looked down by a halfling like you..."

Fergus' words were full of self-deprecation.

Indeed, one side was the dhampir Eruru while the other side was Fergus the Pure of the Pure, a bloodline of pure vampires descended from the True Ancestor. Their difference in status was as disparate as heaven and earth.

In vampire society, Eruru was at the lowest level while Fergus would be a noble of the highest rank.

But these inane social classes had nothing to do with Eruru.

Pointing the sacred gun Argentum's muzzle at Fergus, Eruru coldly commanded.

"The difference in location between our heads is equivalent to our difference in position. If you do not want to eat a bullet, answer my questions obediently."

"Can you, do it...? Since, I am currently, still alive... That means, I still... have value alive. If orders for execution were issued, surely you'd... pierce my head with a bullet, without hesitation at all... Right?"

He was speaking in fragments but he was correct.

Eruru had the power of interrogation but not execution.

Nevertheless.

Eruru pulled the trigger.

Witha bang, the bullet was fired suddenly from the muzzle with a puff of smoke, penetrating Fergus' body.

"...!!"

"It hurts so much that you cannot make a sound, right? Wonderful."

Eruru said mercilessly without the slightest shred of laughter on her face.

Her icy gaze focused on Fergus' right leg that had been pierced by the bullet.

"Indeed, I cannot destroy you, but I can do whatever I want apart from that. Every time you piss me off, I will pull the trigger for you, how about that? Please tell me if you get thirsty, because I will bring a cup of holy water for you."

Eruru's words and expression were completely merciless.

This guy was a vicious vampire who had killed many humans callously. Allowing him to live would be an affront to justice.

Eruru's eyes flickered with stern flames of wrath. Fergus' proper-looking face became grotesque from pain.

"That brat made me understand that the truly frightening are not vampires, but humans instead... You too.. as expected of one whose heritage comes halfly from humans..."

"My bullet seems to have improved the fluency of your speech. Now it is my turn to ask the questions. I will not beat around the bush. Who are the True Ancestors? Where did they come from?"

Without putting down the gun, Eruru interrogated Fergus.

This question must have crossed the mind of everyone who had ever dealt with vampires.

Currently, Eruru tried to open the door to this great mystery.

She continued:

"I know that there were twelve True Ancestors--All of them female. They each established their own bloodline by having children or taking in servants. So, who exactly were these True Ancestors? Monsters from another world? Or from outer space? Or people who underwent some kind of dramatic change?"

"Why... ask about this? Are you curious about your own roots...?"

"I am the one asking the questions."

Eruru pressed the still-hot muzzle against Fergus' forehead.

Scorched, Fergus grimaced in pain but Eruru paid no heed.

"Answer me... Even if the other vampires do not know, a guy like you who is the closest to a True Ancestor, perhaps might know something, more or less? Have you never heard anything about how your own progenitor, the True Ancestor, established her family and rule?"

"...The birth of the True Ancestors is a secret among secrets within our clan. Furthermore, they never revealed much about themselves either. Hence, I know very little. What I know comes merely from fragments of oral tradition."

"Fine. Tell me. What exactly are the True Ancestors~?"

Hearing Eruru's pursuit of the matter, Fergus laughed powerlessly and paused for a while before speaking.

"Those ancestors were called 'those who drank.'"

"'Those who drank'...? Isn't it obvious that vampires drink? Or is it because they drank something that wasn't blood? Or maybe they drank some kind of special blood?"

"God's blood. So goes the rumor, I don't know if it's true."

"Vampires worshiping gods? Deities from where? Like elder gods of antiquity?"

Eruru could not help laughing but Fergus remained serious.

His crimson eyes silently stared at Eruru.

Seeing his eyes, Eruru realized.

What he meant by the word "God."

There were countless deities all over the world but for vampires born in Europe, there was only a single God who stood as a real threat.

"No way... They drank that person's blood... Impossible!?"

"So goes the story. At the last supper, he treated bread as his body and wine as blood to divide and share with his twelve disciples. But the twelve ladies who admired him received nothing. Even at his final moments, they did not get a chance for farewells. Hence, they could only seek to satisfy their desires from his dead body. Sucking the droplets of blood that seeped out, this was the contemptible and pitiful first blood-sucking. However, for my clan, this was the 'first kiss' worthy of commemoration."

The hand holding the gun's grip trembled.

The truth about the True Ancestors, which no expert had ever reached, to think she would hear it in the corner of this kind of jail cell.

And the truth weighed heavily on her.

Trembling slightly, she said:

"Vampires consume human blood to drain the soul and increase their servants. However, there are also rumors that sharing one's blood with others can also create additional servants. But from what I have heard, these attempts usually fail. Humans who obtained vampire blood became monstrosities, neither vampire nor human... Do these rumors originate from the story you are talking about? These twelve women had drunk God's blood once. Nevertheless, they were punished perhaps for defiling God's body, or maybe they were unable to withstand the power they had absorbed. They were meted with eternal punishment. So they are the... True Ancestors!?"

"Perhaps. That's all the rumors say. I have no way of knowing any more than that. But there's one thing you're right about. A vampire sharing one's own blood with someone else, that is taboo to begin with. Very likely, it was a law decided by the True Ancestors themselves."

The mystery that had occupied Eruru's heart for many years was finally elucidated.

Why most vampires had a unique preference for red wine and why they feared the cross.

This all stemmed from reverence towards Him.

"...Then what? This is all you wanted to ask about? I doubt you'd come all the way here just to listen to unverifiable rumors, right?"

"Naturally, next comes the real topic. After the True Ancestors perished, you were afraid that the purity of the vampire bloodline would be compromised, hence ten years ago, you decided to seek Kujou-san's foster mother's help."

"So what?"

"...But after you revived from under the sea, you insisted on Rushella. Since Miraluka was no longer around, changing your target was only logical. But you apparently said to Rushella that the Miraluka was the last True Ancestors ten years ago. Then why did you choose Rushella? If what you said was true, then she is not a True Ancestor. And for you who are so insistent on bloodlines, only True Ancestors or other Pure of the Pure should be the ones who could catch your eye. What is going on?"

Eruru approache the core issue, her tone of voice getting forceful.

In contrast, Fergus' dry lips cracked a grin in delight.

"I was born as one of the Pure of the Pure precisely because of an insistence on bloodlines. There should be many others from other bloodlines who agree with me."

"So? Vampires' inane notions of blood purity have nothing to do with me."

"Aren't humans the same? Ever since antiquity, how many dynasties have sought purity of blood in creating successor candidates to maintain bloodlines? If mortals can think of solutions, why couldn't we vampires?"

"Successor candidates... No way!?"

"The original True Ancestors numbered twelve. But when the surviving True Ancestors were down to half, proponents of purebloodedness in the clan began to take action. If destruction was possible, so was creation. True Ancestors shall be created once again! Created to fill candidates for blood purity!"

Sparkling red light erupted from Fergus' eyes.

But Eruru ignored it. Her attention was focused on organizing the information she had gathered so far.

"Unlike the original True Ancestors, unusual candidates... How to create them? God's blood... No, if that were the case, Rushella ought to be more... Hey, what are you doing!?"

Eruru regained her senses and pointed the muzzle straight at Fergus.

The vampire in front of her was struggling, trying to break free of the chains.

"Futile. In your weakened state, your body cannot break the chains. Even if you struggle free, I will not let you go. Even if you manage to get past me, do you think you can escape this place alive!?"

"True... Yes... I can no longer... do it..."

His tone of voice showed his resignation to his fate.

However, this made Eruru even more suspicious.

Will this vampire bow down to other so easily, given what an authoritarianist to the core he was?

No, this was fishy from the beginning.

Although he was imprisoned here to begin with, deprived of his freedom, would he easily disclose information on the true nature of vampires so easily?

Besides, the person questioning him was a despised dhampir whom he would not deign to bother with in the first place.

Too odd.

Something was definitely wrong to the core.

"What are you scheming!? Do not attempt futile resistance!"

"This is not futile... At the very least, it will catch you people unprepared. Achieveing that is enough. I desire nothing more. Apart from that, I am powerless..."

His emaciated body was giving off an extraordinary aura of violence.

Originally skinny as sticks, his arms suddenly grew muscular, pulling the chains on his arms taut.

His fangs grew long and his claws became sharp.

His crimson eyes were shining ever brighter.

"Where is this power coming from... Drank blood? No, impossible..."

"Indeed... You people never gave me any blood. A high-level vampire like me can endure the thirst, this is what you people judged. A correct judgment. Hence, I seized opportunities to make myself bleed."

"...!?"

"...None of you cared about my self-mutilation. Seeing me make myself bleed, becoming more and more thirsty, you people only treated it as fatigue from being imprisoned here... You have no one to blame but your misfortune...!"

Eruru finally understood Fergus' intent.

A vampire's power would gradually weaken if continuously deprived of blood.

Finally falling to human level in strength or even lower.

But when the thirst reached a limit, their strength would increase dramatically.

Just like the final brightness before a candle burns out, a vampire casts reason aside to become a beast, their consciousness consumed only by the thought of satisfying their thirst.

Talking earlier was Fergus' attempt to stall for time.

Before Eruru reached this cell, his thirst was already approaching its limit.

After Eruru arrived, all he needed to do was wait a little longer.

He only chose to answer Eruru's questions to avoid rousing her suspicions.

"Stop... A last ditch struggle before you die is useless. And for a high-level vampire like you, is this not the greatest humiliation!?"

"Humiliation? I have had enough...!! To think I would be defeated by a bunch of lowly humans and locked away in this kind of place, this is absolutely the greatest irredeemable humiliation... In that case, I will at least take you all down to accompany my journey to hell!"

Eruru reacted just as he finished talking. Without any hesitation, she raised the gun and fired at Fergus between the eyes, but he doddged.

Seeing him dodge a shot fired at almost point-blank range, Eruru could not help but tense up.

Then the chains shattered.

Before her was an uncaged beast, licking his lips, his breath reeking intensely of blood.

"I will abandon my vampire self!!"

Instantly howls resounded through the prison.

This was the fall of a vampire and the birth of a ferocious beast.

Eruru wanted to pursue but a violent claw slashing swung at her abdomen.

The five spread-out fingers sank into her body, tearing her skin open.

Unable to resist in time, Eruru's petite body was knocked away, striking the jail's door.

She barely managed to cross her arms in a defensive stance to soften the impact but it was not very meaningful.

The difference in power was overwhelming.

The massive impact on the back of her head hit her with a wave of dizziness.

In her hazy consciousness, Eruru saw the beast before her.

A beast clad in a strong and muscular body.

Its fangs and claws were long and sharp. The messy blond hair and beard. The long tongue was hanging outside its mouth, licking its lips from time to time.

Unconcerned about the drool dripping from the corner of his mouth, Fergus' bloodshot eyes stared at Eruru.

Even the whites of his eyeballs were blood-red. Not the slightest shred of sanity could be found in his eyes.

Eruru had no power to resist at all.

At this critical moment, the door suddenly opened behind her.

"What happened!?"

Noticing the unusual situation, Rangetsu burst through the door.

Picking up Eruru in her arms, she instantly understood the current situation from the bestial stench filling the interior of the jail cell.

At the same time, she noticed Fergus approaching.

Rangetsu reflexively entered a stance, trying to subdue the prisoner.

However, she suffered a violent kick to the belly.

The impact almost bent her body in an L-shape while an urge to vomit rose up her throat.

In the end, she endured it and counterattacked with her elbow but an impact to her brainstem paralyzed her.

Although this did not make her lose consciousness, Rangetsu could no longer stand and collapsed on the floor.

After fainting briefly, Eruru woke up first and struggled to get up.

"Are you okay...?"

"Well enough. But forget about power, I can't believe I even lost in speed, unacceptable... This concerns my honor. By the way, what is that thing... Are vampires such absurd monsters?"

"He has already abandon his rationality. By deliberately letting himself reach the limit of thirst, he abandoned everything for a final burst of massive power. He is one of the Pure of the Pure, after all. This is totally terrible."

"I see. But why didn't he try to kill us? To be honest, I can't take another direct hit."

Holding the back of her head painfully, Rangetsu groaned.

Although she belonged to the werewolf race whose immortality was on par with vampires, she was unable to parry the attack just now.

Furthermore, it was currently daytime. Without the moon, her body could not bring out its true power.

"That guy has no sanity remaining. All that remains in his body is the base desire for drinking blood. And we were ruled out."

"Monsters and hybrids are worthless to him. He wants to drink blood from pure humans... And a virgin's blood is the top choice, isn't it?"

Rangetsu understood the situation and immediately issued orders by radio.

The facility had to be isolated as quickly as possible so that the rampaging vampire could be exterminated.

"Please evacuate all unarmed personnel, especially women. Right now, they will be bitten in the throat immediately and killed as soon as they face him."

"I understand! We have to hurry too!"

Eruru nodded in agreement and sprang into action with Rangetsu.

The tragedy that had befallen this underground prison at the MPD headquarters must not be allowed to repeat again.

In order to keep up with the swift werewolf, Eruru ran as hard as she could.

"I've always felt that this place is really too dark and gloomy. What are they thinking, leaving girls in this kind of place?"

"Isn't the lighting installed properly? Aren't you overthinking things?"

Mei and Kirika were chatting in the visitor's lounge to kill time.

Due to expecting no outsiders to visit, the Supernatural Investigations Section's "interior decoration" was quite a mood-killer--Only bare concrete walls.

Although someone served them tea, no one else came to attend to them after that.

"I really hope Eruru-chan is able to get some useful information. Seriously, why do I have to waste so much time on that child?"

Mei sounded extremely displeased. Kirika stared at her as though thinking of something.

"...What?"

"Nothing. You look quite happy to me, actually. Not just Kujou-kun recently, but you have been looking down too."

"Of course not! Could you not make random guesses here, okay!?"

Mei denied unhappily but Kirika remained unfazed. Mei continued:

"...It really pisses me off to hear that from you. I'll be clear with you. That girl is a rival, an enemy. What else could she be? Who knows when Hi-kun might get turned into a vampire any time? In fact, wasn't last time really dangerous?"

"True. But... That child, is she a real vampire?"

Hearing this question that overturned the root issue, Mei felt perplexed.

Rushella was definitely a strange one among vampires, but no matter how you looked, she was undoubtedly a vampire.

"What are you talking about after things have come to this? Oh well, perhaps it's just as you said before, Senpai, on first glance, she is just a willful high school girl who is suffering from an extreme case of princess delusions."

"Yes... Indeed, she is quite far from the image of a True Ancestor who has lived for ages. Completely different from Grandma's descriptions. That is why I felt that something was not right from the start."

Based on her own knowledge, Kirika had also pondered Rushella's origins from a different perspective from Eruru's.

What she was particularly concerned about was Rushella's daily life--especially how she fought and bickered with Mei every day.

"Say, you frequently fight with Draculea-san... Do you go all-out?"

"Huh!? Well, sometimes... I think I still keep pretty good restraint."

"If you were locked in death struggle, will you be able to destroy her?"

"Wow, this 'if' is very scary... Senpai, you're acting more and more like Eruru-chan."

"I am asking you seriously. Not whether you will do it, but whether you are capable of doing it."

Seeing Kirika's solemn expression, Mei settled down and did not joke around anymore.

After thinking for a while, she spoke gravely.

"I believe... I can do it. But it'll take a life-and-death situation for me to bring out my true power. Of course, in that kind of situation, I would prepare myself to be killed as well. Who knows if we might end up in a draw, but for sure, it will be a close fight, right?"

"I see... By the way, your power is much lower than the original Frankenstein's creature, right?"

"Yes, what about it? My focus is more on appearance and techniques!"

"That is the issue. That Miraluka vampire said that it would take the original creature to have a chance against a True Ancestor. At the very least, Frankenstein's creature was superior in strength. After all, he was not affected by blood or sunlight and was more stable as a result. But you can match Rushella despite being made with lower specs than the original creature. Isn't that odd? Does a True Ancestor only have this little power?"

This sharp viewpoint made Mei speechless.

It was indeed as Kirika pointed out.

Precisely because Mei fought with Rushella almost every other day, these words struck truly close to home.

Rushella was definitely a high-level vampire, but she was nowhere near True Ancestor level.

Hence, Mei had always been skeptical of Rushella's identity, often poking fun at her on that issue.

"Then that child really is a fake True Ancestor...?"

"Perhaps. But in that case, Kujou-kun would have pointed it out from the start. That would have made it much easier to investigate her past. In other words, there is definitely more to her than just being a fake. Things are not that simple. Do you have any other clues?"

"Why are you asking me? Shouldn't you ask Hi-kun or Eruru-chan?"

"Apart from Kujou-kun, you and I have interacted the most, right? Tell me if you think of anything."

Hearing Kirika ask so forcefully, Mei recalled how Rushella and her had started their bickering relationship ever since the second day of school.

However... She could not think of anything special.

Rushella was arrogant, noisy, competitive, always getting into arguments... *etc*. Mei recalled it all.

Throughout each of their bickering days, was there anything amiss?

Her body could still remember that feeling.

After spending so much time with Rushella, that feeling was getting stronger and stronger.

"That child... Isn't she getting weaker and weaker?"

"Huh?"

"She should've been sucking Hi-kun's blood all along, so malnourishment is definitely not an issue, but I feel that... The beginning was actually when her power was at its peak and I couldn't be careless with her. Of course, that's not to say that she's gone through an extreme change, the difference is very small... That's what I want to point out."

"Sucking blood all along but weakening in strength...? What might be the reason...!?"

Kirika crossed her arms and pondered. Mei also frowned in puzzlement.

There was a noise.

With keen senses surpassing ordinary people, she captured the roars of a beast behind walls.

At the same time, a stench invaded her nostrils.

There was also the pungent smell of blood.

"Hey... Is there an emergency!?"

"Eh...?"

Kirika did not understand why.

At this moment, a crack appeared in the concrete wall in front of the two girls.

Meanwhile, at the entrance to the MPD headquarters...

Having visited before, Rushella walked towards the underground without hesitation.

Using her crimson eyes to catch a certain police officer, she ordered him to lead the way.

She questioned everyone using the keywords of "Supernatural Investigations Section" or asking where people who knew of this term could be found. This she did repeatedly.

Finally, with increasing information density, she reached the Supernatural Investigations Section's headquarters.

Taking her time, eschewing impatience, thinking before acting--She changed from her usual way of doing things, trespassing using well thought out methods.

Her efforts were rewarded as she finally infiltrated the headquarter facilities.

But next up was the real problem.

Her current location was nothing more than the outer layer of the Supernatural Investigations Section. External personnel were still active in this area.

Apart from its unusual, underground location, this place was no different from what was usually seen in police drama with people carrying out ordinary business like in a normal police organization.

Using an invisibility spell, a vampire's expertise, to pass through here was nothing hard.

The problem was what came next--How to reach the jail cell in the depths.

In the past, Eruru had told her, partially as a warning and partially as advice:

Monsters that had committed serious crimes were imprisoned in the depths of the Supernatural Investigations Section, suffering what would be equivalent to hellish torment to vampires.

If she was not lying, that guy must be there.

Out of all the vampires she had encountered, of all the monsters she had encountered, he was the only one who knew a little about her origins--That Pure of the Pure.

Suppose he was already executed or there were other monsters being imprisoned there, it was possible that she could find someone else who knew about her origins.

For the sake of this final lead, Rushella hid herself and bided her time.

Naturally, she had thought of infiltrating the interior by covering her tracks completely, but it was very difficult to pull off in fact.

As an anti-monster facility, there were naturally many countermeasures. The police personnel active here were presumably resistant to the mystic eyes.

Just as Rushella was out of ideas, the shrill sound of an alarm was heard.

Then emergency announcements were broadcasted.

"Prison break. Repeat, prison break. Noncombat personnel, please hurry and act according to procedure and await further instructions. Repeat--"

The Section began to get noisy.

But the staff was well-trained after all. Very quickly, they terminated their tasks at hand and took measures according to procedure.

Some of them rushed to the emergency exits and left the scene.

Some of them went inside, put on various equipment and ran downstairs.

Everyone was taking precautions against a certain underground threat, taking clear measures according to their role.

Precisely because of the emergency, confronted with an unknown threat coming from underground, they relaxed their guard against the surface.

Rushella suppressed her breathing and waited for a chance.

Some people evacuated while others rushed towards the scene. After determining each person's destination, Rushella locked onto one of the people who was walking towards the depths of the Supernatural Investigations Section.

Just as Rushella confirmed the last person in a final group of people, she took action.

Hiding her presence, eliminating the sound of her footsteps, walking in perfect unison, she followed after the anti-vampire equipped policemen who were wearing neck protection.

The dark passage was filled with an unpleasant smell.

It was a unique smell different from normal bleeding.

It was the smell produced by reckless blood sucking.

"My kindred is engaged in depraved behavior, I see?"

With a certain level of self-contempt, Rushella clenched her fists.

The scene was utterly chaotic.

As a police organization after all, they were well-prepared against criminals and terrorists.

And as the Supernatural Investigations Section, they also had countermeasures against monsters and humans who conspired with monsters.

However, they were facing an unprecedented formidable foe today.

Simply stated--Impossible to understand.

When they expected him to rush to the ground surface, he lingered underground. All who encountered him met terrible fates.

When they expected to hold his ground and fight, he would move instantaneously, breaking through encirclement with unpredictable speed, concealing himself.

Precisely because the policemen of the Supernatural Investigations Section were well-prepared against traditional vampires, the unpredictable enemy was throwing them in disarray.

For a monster that was supposed to think similar to a human to make unexpected movements again and again...

This alone would not be too bad.

But the problem was that the enemy was excessively powerful.

Bullets shot by the police were effortlessly dodged. Faced with spraying holy water, he was completely unafraid.

These attacks only served to fuel his ferocity while he roared like a beast and attacked.

Switching from bullets to melee weaponry, some people tried traditional methods--hammering a stake into the heart. But as soon as they approached, their heads were torn off, dying right on the spot.

The alloyed armor used to isolate the floor was shattered by his sheer brute force, then he escaped.

An irrational monster was unstoppable.

This clear and massive threat steamrolled all opposition, finally arriving at the top floor of the underground complex.

Smashing through the wall, he found new prey before him. The monster licked its lisp with its crimson tongue.

"Oh dear... Isn't this the vampire from last time? What a waste of that handsome face, right?"

Facing off against Fergus, Mei commented with levity.

However, her face was not relaxed the slightest.

The air was filled with a choking stench of blood. The monster's skin was covered with dried blood. Presumably, he must have experienced a feast of carnage before arriving here.

Those bloodshot eyes also indicated that there was no sanity left in his brain.

He had turned into a beast completely, turning into a demonic beast that only sought fresh blood.

There was no point in capturing him alive. Mei decided to prioritize shooting him to death and began to attack.

However, Fergus did not pay attention to Mei at all.

He was only interested in Kirika whom Mei had shielded behind her.

"Rawr--!!"

Fergus gave a ear-splitting howl and kicked the ground hard.

He was focused on his target--Kirika's neck.

At the last moment, Mei rushed in between, using both hands to stop Fergus' claws, the two of them locked in a contest of strength on the spot.

"Target is... a young virgin's blood? That's right, the only one who fits is Senpai here...!?"

Mei calmly analyzed the situation while harsh reality was making her gnash her teeth.

She was using full strength, intending to crush the enemy's hands and break his arms.

Even so--she was still losing.

The monster's claws clenched her hands. Even her bones were screaming.

"Not even sundown yet... Such strength...!? Even for a Pure of the Pure, this is too much...!?"

Mei could not help but feel anxious.

The enemy before her eyes had a confident and violent smile hanging on his face while he cornered his insignificant prey.

Mei staggered backwards, her hands creaking from the pressure.

Unable to match the opponent's strength, Mei yelled out to Kirika behind her.

"Senpai, hurry and run!"

At the same time, a dazzling flash of light erupted from Mei's eyes.

The solar beams shot out from her eyes. This was originally prepared for using against Rushella, a destructive weapon concentrating the power of the sun to counter vampires.

Seeing the beams strike the enemy's face, Mei looked delighted.

Even if it failed to destroy him, it should inflict heavy injuries.

However...

"...Huh!?"

The sound of bone being crushed came from her hands.

Accompanied by a pang of intense pain, she saw her hands crushed and deformed.

Mei went pale as she looked at her opponent, an angry beast.

The solar beams had struck their target for sure.

His hair was burnt while his pale and handsome face was completely incinerated. A tragic sight.

However, his eyes were completely unharmed.

Even greater murderous intent was seething in his eyes as he glared at Mei.

"--!!"

She had never feared any monster before.

That was because she was a monster herself, but more importantly, even against powerful monsters as enemies, she could still defeat them with ease.

But this tradition was overturned.

With both hands crushed, Mei could no longer stop Fergus. The beast grabbed her by the chest and casually lifted her up, throwing her to the side.

This motion was as casual as throwing a scrap of paper into a trash can, but the massive strength turned it into a finishing move.

Mei's body crashed hard against the wall. Unfortunately, she happened to hit the back of her head.

Her clothing and underwear was shredded by the sharp claws, producing red marks on the skin of her chest, exposing her voluptuous bosom to the air.

Having lost consciousness completely, Mei naturally could not hide her exposed chest, collapsed against the wall.

Then Fergus paid no more attention to Mei.

He was uninterested in an artificial human to begin with.

Currently, all that remained inside him was the pinnacle of one desire--the thirst for blood.

The one element causing his desire to expand further was right in front of him--an excellent virgin.

Fergus' eyes flashed with dangerous red light as he approached.

Kirika was unable to move, trembling, rooted to the spot.

Although she knew how to fight against monsters, her enemy was too frightening.

More importantly, the monster's mystic eyes... No, the killing aura exuded from all over the monster had pinned Kirika down.

Like a frog caught in a snake's sights, a virgin intimidated by a vampire.

Immobilizing Kirika, Fergus grabbed her arm.

The beast exhaled large breaths of nauseating stench as he brought his mouth to Kirika's neck.

His blood-red eyes were filled with lust and gluttony, burning with terrifying thirst that surpassed primal desires.

"No..."

Kirika tearfully shook her head.

Her behavior only served to provoke the beast's sadistic heart. Fergus licked his lips while drooling.

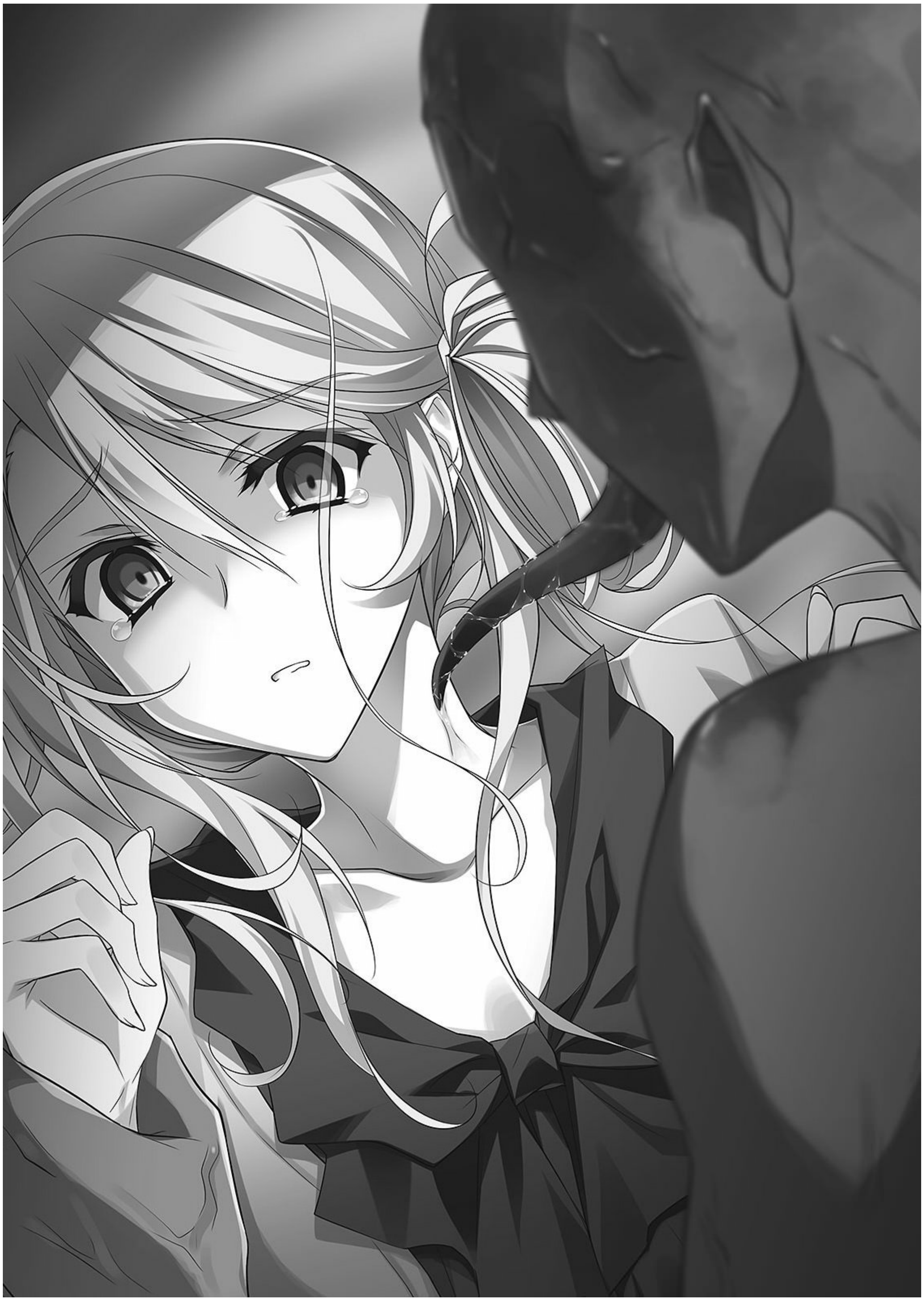
Like a carnivorous beast's, his long tongue slid across Kirika's pale neck.

"--!"

Shuddering intensely, she struggled with disgust.

Fergus ignored her resistance and opened his jaws.

This method of eating was no longer about sucking blood. Most likely, he would bite off an entire chunk of flesh from her neck.



Then before the sharp fangs could make contact with the skin, a gust of wind swept towards the beast's belly.

"Unhand her!!"

With vigor as though trying to gouge his belly, the new arrival unleashed a fierce spinning mid-level kick.

The impact sounded like kicking a heavy tire. Fergus was separated from Kirika.

"...Oogami-san?"

Surrounded by fear, Kirika noticed her savior.

Rangetsu looked like she had sprinted all the way here, panting nonstop with her mouth open.

She was probably trying to tell Kirika to escape but before she could speak, Fergus attacked.

"Rawr!"

"Tsk..!"

Rangetsu clicked her tongue and had no choice but to engage Fergus in close quarters combat.

Fergus did not care about tactics at all, simply using his powerful arms, trying to tear his prey's flesh. Rangetsu kept her distance and opposed him using magnificent kicking skills.

Kicking the ground with one foot, Rangetsu used a skillful mixture of power and subtlety to deliver a series of kicks to Fergus' head, belly and ankles.

Given a werewolf's powerful legs, even a vampire could not escape unscathed if struck directly.

However, Fergus was currently a monster that had surpassed vampires.

Every time she kicked her target, Rangetsu only felt the dull pain in her leg increasing.

While Rangetsu was gradually depleting her energy, if she were to be struck by his swinging arms, surely her flesh would be shaved off together with bones beneath.

In contrast, Fergus was not pushed at all. Rubbing the parts that were kicked, it seemed like Rangetsu's attacks only managed to tickle him.

Then the battle reached a critical point.

Originally using astounding speed to keep the battle even, Rangetsu suddenly halted in her leg movements.

Her handsome face was filled with pain and fatigue.

Seeing his contemptible enemy stop attacking, Fergus laughed.

This was the laughing face of a carnivore about to emerge victorious.

Roaring, he raised his mighty arms, swinging them down on Rangetsu's head--

Instantly, Rangetsu vanished.

Fergus' sharp claws slashed through empty space, only catching her jacket.

Just as he felt surprised, a sigh came from behind.

"I knew it... Only this method would work."

Before he could turn around, Rangetsu reached out and grabbed his arms from below his armpits, sealing his movements.

Hand to hand combat was unfavorable for Rangetsu to begin with. Even holding a slight advantage in speed, she was going to lose from exhaustion sooner or later.

Hence, she could only do this to defeat him completely.

"Kariya-san, hurry!!"

Rangetsu yelled urgently. Only then did Kirika notice Eruru's presence.

Arriving slightly after Rangetsu, Eruru raised her arm weakly, aiming the sacred gun Argentum at Fergus.

All she needed to do was aim for the heart.

For silver bullets to produce the greatest effect against vampires, one must shoot the heart.

However, even an amateur like Kirika could easily see that the current shot was full of risks.

Eruru's forearms were swollen and bruised, clearly a recent injury.

But what Kirika did not know was that Eruru had gotten injured when Fergus broke out of prison. Luckily, her arms were not broken but even lifting them was taking her full effort.

Let alone with Rangetsu standing right behind the target.

Considering the sturdiness of Fergus' current enhanced musculature, there was probably no need to worry about the bullet penetrating his body.

But in the event she shot Rangetsu, the silver bullet could very well take her life.

And this was probably the only chance. If she failed to strike the heart and produce a critical hit, he would surely kill her in return.

Pain and pressure was making Eruru hesitate. Argentum's muzzle also trembled from the wavering in her heart.

"Don't hesitate, hurry and shoot!"

Rangetsu desperately restrained the struggling Fergus and yelled at Eruru.

At the same time, Eruru widened her eyes and pulled the trigger.

The gun's recoil caused immense pain to her injured arms.

Then--The bullet strayed from its target.

Although it struck Fergus' body, the bullet penetrated the center of his chest.

Everyone present gnashed their teeth as despair invaded their heart.

Eruru wanted to shoot again but could not endure the pain in her arm. Before she knew it, the gun slid and fell on the ground.

Rangetsu also could not restrain Fergus any longer and he escaped.

The beast regained his freedom.

Having suffered a hit from a silver bullet after all, his movements also lagged during the moment of release.

This brief moment was all that was necessary.

"It's been a while."

These words were probably meant for everyone present.

The first to react was Mei who had finally regained consciousness.

"It's you...!"

Rushella was standing before their eyes.

Understanding the situation with a sweep of her gaze across the scene, she immediately charged at Fergus.

The two vampires passed by each other. Rushella was wielding her usual dagger in her hand.

The blade pierced Fergus' left chest without hesitation.

"Gah..."

Accompanied by a painful groan, blood spewed from Fergus' mouth.

Rushella remained unshaken, using her other hand to push the dagger's hilt, burying the blade deep into his chest.

Blood spurted from the wound, dyeing Rushella's face red.

This was apparently Fergus' silent opposition. Rushella looked up at him with a grim expression.

Bald with a decaying face, his former visage existed no longer.

Nevertheless, his bloodshot eyes recovered his sanity as a former Pure of the Pure.

Gazing down upon the enemy, he laughed in mockery at the True Ancestor who was supposed to outrank him.

"...!?"

Rushella did not understand his intentions but Fergus laughed with even less restraint.

"Next, it's your turn."

"What do you mean...!?"

"You will become like this too."

Fergus laughed while answering.

His laughter was giving every listener the creeps. The ear-splitting laughter did not show any signs of stopping.

While laughing, he slowly turned into ash.

His body collapsed amidst the laughter, the ashes scattering in the air along with his shaking body.

His legs had already eroded while his arms scattered into dust.

But only his laughter lingered in the air.

His body collapsed, his chest decayed, his face broke apart, finally his entire body returned to nothingness. Only his laughter remained resounding in their ears, repeating nonstop.

The surroundings returned to silence but everyone was shrouded under a heavy atmosphere.

After a long while, Rushella picked up her dagger and quickly prepared to leave.

Eruru swiftly rushed over to block her.

"Wait, you came here for a purpose, right?"

"...There's none now."

"Most likely, you wanted to question that destroyed vampire, right? Or perhaps you wanted to go through the Supernatural Investigations Section's information, right? Unfortunately, the Pure of the Pure was destroyed before you could question him. I have already asked him what you wanted to ask. Stay here if you want to know the answer."

"..."

Hearing Eruru's suggestion, Rushella seemed to be indecisive.

Rubbing the back of her head that was still throbbing with pain, Mei said:

"I could keep this a secret if you don't want Hi-kun to know. You'll owe me this favor for the rest of your life."

Then Rangetsu also tried to persuade Rushella to stay. Leaning her exhausted body against the wall, she crossed her arms and said:

"I can prepare a room for you immediately. Oh well, perhaps a True Ancestor might not take well to staying at this kind of rundown place."

"..."

Rushella looked down.

Finally, Kirika ran over and patted her shoulder.

"In any case... Let's have a good talk together, shall we? Have you been eating properly? Kujou-kun is also worried sick about you..."

Kirika stared at Rushella's face as she asked her.

But Rushella's face remained gloomy.

Just as Kirika tried to convince her further, Rushella suddenly held her own throat and knelt down.

"Hey, what is wrong!?"

Kirika leaned in to ask her.

But Rushella held up a hand to stop her.

"Don't come over... Get away!"

"What are you talking about!? What's happening!?"

Kirika bent down in worry but she immediately understood what Rushella meant.

Rushella's eyes were shining with dazzling red light.

White fangs--growing sharper and longer.

More importantly, her beautiful face was being invaded by thirst.

The way she was panting, Kirika had just witnessed it a while ago.

Almost bitten by those vicious fangs just now--A vampire's kiss.

Before she knew it, Rushella stood up, bringing her lips near Kirika's neck.

"Stop, get away"--Someone was shouting not far away.

But Rushella quickly regained her senses herself.

Fearfully, she embraced herself and withdrew from Kirika's side.

Everyone's gaze was making her uncomfortable. Rushella kept shaking her head as though trying to deny herself.

Then she ran outside.

"Wait...!"

Kirika wanted to chase her but a painful and sorrowful voice stopped her.

"Get away... Don't come over!!"

Rushella disappeared into the depths of the passage.

No one chased after her.

For some reason, none of them were willing to give chase.

The four of them silently exchanged glances. Shortly after, Rangetsu spoke up first:

"That child... Isn't the situation very bad!? She looks awfully thirsty, we have to take countermeasures quickly."

No one could object.

Only Kirika seemed to have something to say, but in the end, she did not speak.

Even if she tried to argue, she was currently completely unconvincing, given that she had almost turned into a victim just now.

"She's not actually stupid, she's just confused right now. Well... She should be able to make it outside. But what about after that? Once she calms down, I will personally lead a team to capture her... How's that?"

Rangetsu asked Eruru.

Eruru hesitated for a moment then nodded in agreement.

"Do you think that child will catch and bite people? Well, she is not far from her limit..."

Mei analyzed the situation and asked Eruru and Rangetsu.

With a grave expression, Eruru explained the horrifying truth about vampires.

"Normally, a vampire's strength is proportional to the quality and quantity of blood they have sucked. Hence, a vampire who has not drunk blood for a long time will gradually weaken, finally becoming even weaker than a human. However, once the thirst reaches a limit, their strength will rise dramatically instead. This turns them into beasts that only know to suck blood, abandoning all rational thought."

"I already know this from the tragic sight just now. So it's like a final burst of strength before starving to death, is that what you mean?"

"Vampires do not have the concept of starving to death. Before reaching the absolute limit of thirst, they will lose their sanity first. Then destruction is their only salvation."

"Impossible... to turn back?"

Hearing Eruru's cold declaration, Kirika asked with pity.

"...This depends on the situation and timing. If they obtain blood soon after losing their minds, they generally can recover their sense of self. However, there are many vampires who are unable to face the shame and humiliation of how they behaved. Especially high-ranking vampires, this is mortifying humiliation to them."

"Then... What happens if more time goes by?"

"Then there is no turning back. No matter how much blood they drink, their desire cannot be satisfied. Only attacking humans nonstop, drinking blood without pause. Although victims will be many, this type of vampire will usually perish after one night, which counts as the only good news among bad news."

"What do you mean? That kind of rampaging vampire will settle down after one night? But isn't it impossible to recover their sanity?"

Mei asked naturally. Rangetsu answered on Eruru's behalf.

"It's precisely because they've lost their minds. These monsters only suck blood, thinking of nothing else, even failing to notice when the sun comes up."

"Oh... I get it now?"

"Yes. They no longer know to avoid sunlight. Hence, no matter how violent, they perish in the end. Even if they were indoors, as long as there's no prey, they will go outside eventually. Like in this incident, ignoring the matter of victims, leaving him alone is the easiest method. Also, the final fate of critical thirst applies to dhampirs as well. Don't you go trying to test your limits either."

The final sentence was spoken towards Eruru.

Eruru avoided eye contact but could not evade the comment.

"I know. About Rushella... Just do as you like. Anyway, we are leaving."

Eruru left the devastated visitor's lounge.

Mei and Kirika followed and quietly asked here.

"Hey hey... That's it?"

"Shouldn't we tell Kujou-kun...?"

"He is currently useless. We can only depend on ourselves to resolve this matter."

Eruru's answer made Mei and Kirika exchange glances.

However, Eruru continued expressionlessly:

"Capturing Rushella was not impossible earlier, but that would surely mean giving her up to the Supernatural Investigations Section. Since that kind of tragedy just happened, she might end up getting executed on the spot. For her sake, I had to let her escape outside first, even though it is very troublesome."

"Eruru-chan... Well played."

"You should have told us honestly from the start. What you mean is that we have to find her before the police does, right?"

"I will not force any of you. Join in only if you wish."

The two girls tugged at the cheeks of Eruru's poker face from opposite directions.

"Seriously, you're such a tsundere❤"

"You should have your elders dote on you from time to time."

"...Stop it. Also, stop pulling at my face."

"So adorable. Good girl❤"

"You keep silent all the time, but I never knew you were so considerate for Kujou-kun~~ Maybe you're actually my greatest rival."

"Stop it right now, stop pulling my face this way and that!"

The trio departed amidst jokes and laughter.

Rangetsu watched them helplessly.

"...I heard all that, you know? Don't you know about a werewolf's hearing? Or rather... You did it on purpose?"

Rangetsu muttered wryly. Naturally, no one answered her questions.

Chapter 4 - Crimson Reunion

On Saturday, Hisui was taking a walk aimlessly.

With nowhere he wanted to go and nothing he wanted to do, he was simply going out to kill time.

Back when Rushella was around, he was constantly being hassled by her to do this and that, never obtaining a moment's peace and quiet.

Despite being only sixteen years of age, he seemed to have already experienced how it would feel to be a father who still had to labor for his family on holidays in addition to working day and night.

Ever since Rushella went missing, Hisui spent time every Saturday to look for her.

Visiting places where she might be staying, with Mei or Eruru accompanying him on occasion.

After all, Rushella had a peerlessly beautiful face and an outstanding figure. Hisui also tried to collect information on the internet about otherwordly beauties.

Then what about now?

To be honest, he did not know what else he could do. Walking in the streets, he was unable to improve his mood.

Rushella still could not be found.

Even if he found her, what then?

Ask her to come back?

Since she had most likely left on her own will, such words were not going to work.

It was possible that she left because she regained her memories.

Perhaps she had simply gone back to how a vampire should act.

"...Maybe she's already forgotten me, sucking other people's blood like a normal vampire, living in a castle somewhere."

Hisui could not help but let these words leak from his mouth. The way he kept pining for her was truly disgusting.

The sun had long set and the surroundings were all dark.

He had already eaten dinner. If he stayed outside any longer, he would most likely get dragged off to remedial counseling.

Staring into the starry sky, Hisui sighed and turned back home.

No lights were on at home and it looked like Miraluka still had not returned.

Ever since that altercation with Eruru, she had not returned home at all.

Hisui tactfully asked Eruru but she did not know either.

Eruru had expressed that "I shall let you know if she did anything that requires punishment." This joke was totally not funny and Hisui did not know whether he ought to believe her or not.

Furthermore, Hisui had texted her in a casual chatting tone of voice.

In the past, Eruru would always reply in her plain style devoid of emoticons or textual expressions.

However, she did not respond this time.

Hisui was at a loss right now, so he tried to text Mei and Kirika too. But the result was the same: these two girls normally replied for sure, but ignored him today.

"Am I being ostracized by them? What are those three girls doing?"

Finding his few friendships had grown distant as well, Hisui sighed and made his way to the bathroom.

Filling the tub with hot water felt too much of a pain, so he decided to just take a shower.

I'll take a hot shower to clear up my mind.

Sitting on a stool in the bathroom, he started with washing his hair.

Just as he was about to turn the tap, a familiar voice greeted him.

"Hey there, welcome home."

--What?

Hisui turned around, only to see the bathtub filled with hot water and a pale nude body soaking inside.

Or rather, it was Miraluka enjoying a bath.

"Ehhhhhhhhhhhh!?"

"Stop screeching, it's noisy."

Frowning with displeasure, Miraluka scooped a handful of hot water and splashed Hisui's face.

Eating a handful of hot water in the face, Hisui's mental circuits finally went back on track.

"Eh... W-Why are you here!?"

"What's wrong with taking a bath in my own home?"

"I'm asking why are you home!?"

"You didn't notice my shoes at the entrance? I did take off my shoes when entering the house, you know."

"Uh, but no lights were on at home and the bathroom was all dark too..."

Hisui only realized after saying these words.

The woman before his eyes was--

"Do know that I am a vampire. Although that's not to say that night vision is superior, lighting is nothing more than an indulgence rather than a necessity. I wanted to think over things, so I switched off the bathroom lights. My thoughts are keener in the dark, you already knew this a long time ago, don't you?"

"...Yeah."

Finally undertanding the situation, Hisui calmed down as well.

He had already grabbed a wash basin to cover up his lower body securely.

"Umm, how should I put this? It's not good to disturb a lady in her bath, I'll be taking my leave now..."

"Why are you speaking as if you were a matchmaker excusing himself from the table? Don't be shy, it's a good opportunity for me to give you a good back scrubbing every now and then."

Saying that, Miraluka stood up.

Her naked body was completely open to view.

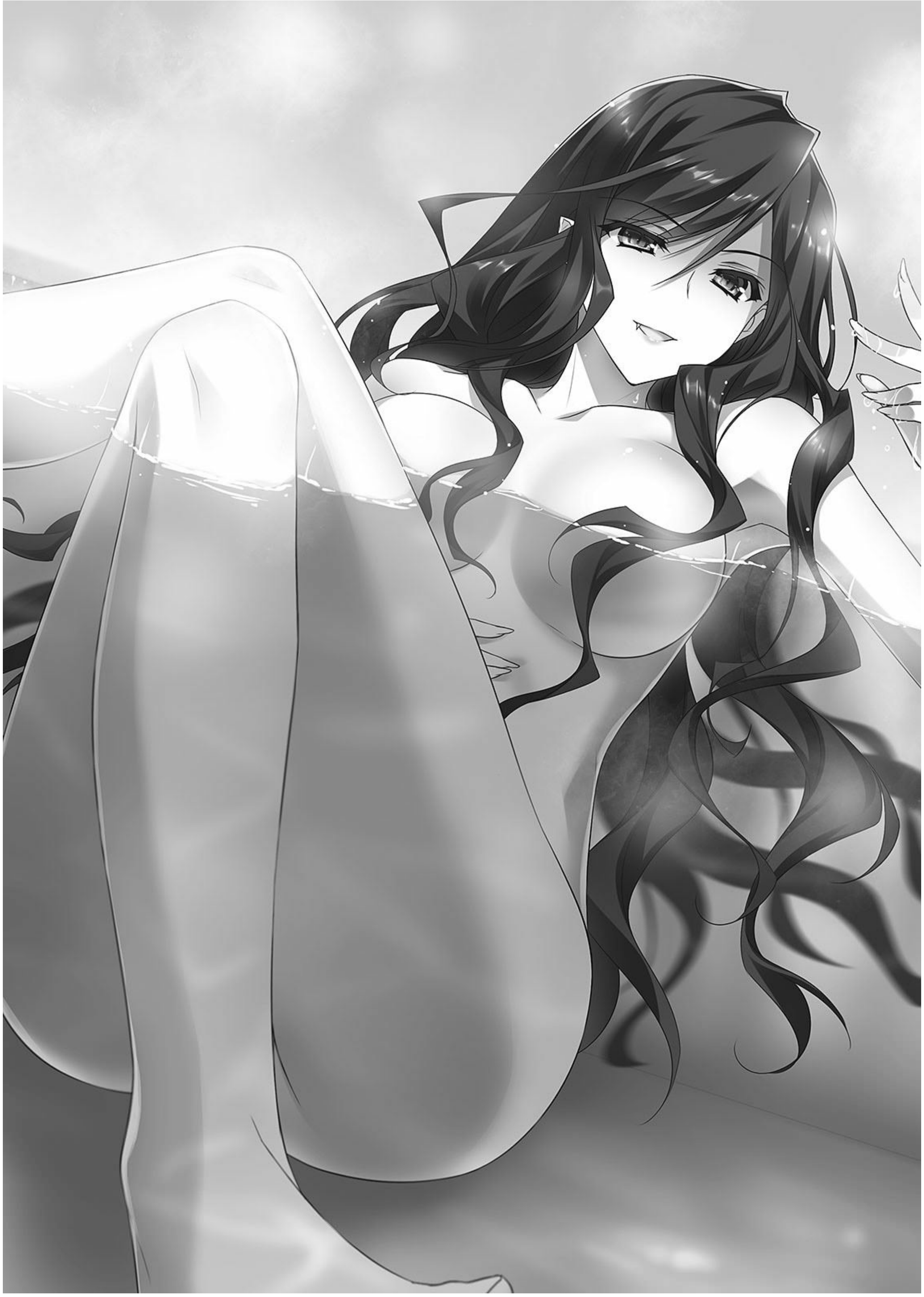
Before Hisui had a chance to avert his gaze, Miraluka's body had already arrived before his eyes.

Her snow-white skin, pristine and clear, was pure white and dazzling without any reddening despite having soaked in hot water for so long.

Her beautiful skin did not have the slightest freckle or mole and was like flawless white jade. Only the palm of her hand still had the unhealed wound from Eruru's silver bullet.

The wound seemed to have recovered mostly since that night, but the skin surface was still a little heartwrenching to behold.

Nevertheless, this bit of injury could not hide the perfect beauty of her naked body, breathtaking as it was.



Because apart from her hand, the rest of her body was too beautiful, so beautiful that it made one overlook the minor flaws.

As she stepped out of the tub, her massive bosom also shook up and down.

The watery fruits maintained their perfect shape no matter what angle one admired them from. Exiting the bath, they looked even more tender and fresh than usual.

Dew was dripping down from those slightly protruding and adorable flower buds, flowing past her lower abdomen, disappearing in the bush--finally flowing to her feet.

Even the natural phenomenon of water droplets dripping from the action of gravity turned into seductive beauty before his eyes.

The femininity she embodied was something possessed by none of the girls Hisui had gotten to know so far.

Ever since meeting Rushella, he had witness the naked female body many times in unavoidable situations. But this time, it was definitely the woman's fault without a doubt.

Actually, there was no need for him to feel embarrassed.

Since early childhood, this body that remained unchanged over the long years had appeared before his eyes who knew how many times.

Narrow waist, long legs, slightly wet black hair--Everything was the same as back then.

By the time he regained his senses, Miraluka had already circled around to Hisui's back.

"Hey, hold on!"

"What's the matter? Don't move. There has never been a man in history who could make me scrub his back."

"But men who agreed to kneel down and lick your feet are as numerous as the stars in the sky."

"Want me to tell you the details?"

"No thanks, I don't want the world in my mind to get overturned."

Hisui gave up on resistance and ceded control of his back over to Miraluka.

Miraluka used the bath sponge to squeeze out soap suds then scrubbed Hisui's back in an experienced manner.

Well... It was quite comfortable after all.

There was also a kind of... nostalgic feeling.

Back when he was too young to wash his hair on his own, the two of them would enter the bath together like this.

Perhaps... This was not bad once in a while.

But no more than back scrubbing.

"...Eh?"

Then he felt a soft and seductive feeling on his back.

Not only did it carry Rushella and Mei's level of elasticity, it was even superior in terms of volume.

Precisely because of that, the tactile sensation was making him enter ecstasy.

Furthermore, the remaining soap made the twin peaks on Hisui's back even more lubricated.

"M-Miraluka-san, what are you doing?"

"What? I am washing your body for you. I'm totally fine if you want to turn around too, okay?"

"No no... No way!"

"Then that's all I can do. Or how about using my breasts? I've never tried it but I've heard that men like to do it that way."

Saying that, Miraluka lifted her breasts up from below, deliberately emphasizing their volume.

Pushing those protruding flower buds against Hisui's back, she urged him to answer.

For only an instant, Hisui almost wanted to ask her to do it. But by sheer force of will, he just barely managed to keep his mouth shut.

Be calm.

I've encountered this kind of thing before.

Apart from Mei's assault in the bathroom, he had experienced numerous similar crises.

He had survived many trials and tribulations.

In front of his eyes was nothing more than the type of body possessed by those girls, but the person in front of him was not those girls.

Indeed, this body belonged to his family. Thinking that would be fine.

Hence, he would not get into thoughts of desire.

He had no mother or sisters to begin with.

He just happened to have this one and only person as family.

Replaying the bodies of the beautiful maidens in his mind, Hisui frantically chanted a mantra to steady his thoughts.

"This is a family member's body... This is a family member's body... This is a family member's body..."

"What on earth are you muttering about? Oh well, whatever, if you don't like breasts, then I'll wash you the normal way."

Ignoring Hisui who was in total panic, Miraluka carefully scrubbed his back.

She was performing the task seriously but her breasts would still touch him frequently, touching him again and again all the time.

But if he ran away, she would surely beat him half dead, so he was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

"Your body is still so delicate. You need to grow up stronger."

"Shut up, I consider it a defeat if I ever become bulked up in muscle."

"What are you talking about?"

Miraluka continued the conversation but her hand slid from his flank to his thigh then between his legs--

"...Stop. I'll do this place myself."

"Don't be shy, it's already a familiar sight to me ever since you were this small."

"Shut the fuck up and stop using your finger to gesture the size. No thank you, think about it, you wouldn't want it either if our roles were reversed, would you!?"

"I wouldn't. Oh right, it's not quite right if it's only me servicing you. I've already washed you clean today, so next time it's your turn to..."

"I'll say this first, absolutely no way!"

Hisui desperately used a towel to guard his sacred territory and asserted.

Unlike him, she would surely sit face to face generously to allow him to scrub her without feeling such embarrassment.

What kind of bathroom play was this?

"You always say no to everything. What now, you're not satisfied with me washing you? If you don't like the sponge, then I'll use my hands to wash you? Or how about the breasts... Like this."

Saying that, Miraluka squeezed her bountiful breasts, groping them up and down before Hisui's eyes.

To think she even clamped the body wash bottle in her cleavage, what a detailed performance.

"Hmm, something terrible will happen if you keep doing this, so please give me a break!"

Hisui began to wail so Miraluka had no choice but to stop invading his sacred territory.

This was an unprecedented crisis that the sacred territory had never met since its founding. Just as Hisui breathed a sigh of relief for surviving the crisis, he suddenly felt his earlobe bitten by a pair of lips.

"Then I'll do this."

Miraluka inserted her tongue directly into his ear canal, toying with him as she pleased.

Hisui felt intense sensations run through his entire body as though his spine was getting electrocuted.

Without giving him any chance to rest, Miraluka swept her slender fingers across his chest and violated his nipples.

Rub rub--

"Hyauh!"

Hisui screamed in high pitch like a girl, leaning his body forward.

The unknown sense of pleasure made his entire body twich as Miraluka looked down at him with delight. Scooping hot water from the tub with a wash basin, she poured water over Hisui and her body.

Washing the suds away, their bodies were finally done with bathing.

"Don't underestimate me. Even without exposing my naked body, I can still make countless heroes submit just by moving this finger."

"T-Technician..."

Uttering his last words, Hisui collapsed forward on the floor.

The last scene he saw was that of Miraluka's naked body.

Futhermore, because he was looking up from the floor, her entire lower body, including the garden at the root of her beautiful legs was also completely in view.

Perhaps dying like this was a kind of happiness.

"Then I'm going out. Enjoy a good soak here. Oh right, come to my room after you're done."

Miraluka waved lightly then casually left the bathroom.

It took Hisui quite a long time before he was able to stand up again.

"...Then why do I have to use the hair dryer to blow dry your hair?"

"No helping it, my hair is long. This goes the same for humans and vampires regardless. I've been waiting for you to finish your bath and even now, it's still all wet."

Just as Miraluka asked, Hisui went to her room as soon as he got out of the bathroom.

Hisui had sort of guessed this result beforehand. As soon as he entered the room, Miraluka tossed the hair dryer at him, asking him to dry her hair.

Holding a comb in his right while using the hair dryer with his left, he combed and dried Miraluka's hair like a professional hairstylist.

Thinking back, Hisui had started doing this job from a very young age.

Before he had learned to wash dishes and do laundry, Miraluka had already ordered him to hold the comb and the hair dryer to fix up her hair.

The two of them would always do it in Miraluka's bedroom, on this extra large bed.

Perhaps normally speaking, sitting in front of the dressing table mirror would be more appropriate but unfortunately, mirrors did not show the reflections of vampires.

Hence, Miraluka always sat casually at the head of the bed, calling Hisui over to her.

"Your skills haven't gone rusty. I'm so glad I taught you personally."

"Don't say it so weird. Even while you were gone, my hands have never had an idle moment."

That's right--Hisui had been thinking about this all along.

During summer, after the incident with Fergus and Touko, for some reason, Rushella started demanding Hisui to dry her hair whenever she got out of the bath.

"Too much of a hassle." "Can't be bothered." Hisui rejected her with a total lack of motivation, then Rushella gave him a sound beating. In the end, it became his daily task.

"What kind of unfair world is this? Does an entire race of female vampires have something against me?"

"I don't know about others and I have no interest to know either. But you must remember this: talking about other women in front of a woman is taboo no matter what race you're dealing with."

Seeing Miraluka's piercing stare, Hisui frantically shifted his gaze away.

He knew he was in the wrong.

This sort of thing had happened countless times with Rushella too.

Whenever he mentioned Miraluka in front of Rushella, she would lose her temper. So the reverse was the same--This was not hard to predict.

"...It's done."

Having dried her hair, Hisui left Miraluka's side.

Her lustrous and beautiful hair was shining radiantly, standing testament to Hisui's accomplishments.

His skills were impeccable.

Hisui returned the comb and hair dryer to their original place and prepared to leave the room. At this moment, Miraluka grabbed his arm.

"Hey, service me on occasion. It's not like you'll get punished for massaging my shoulders and back."

"I already did a bit for you just now."

"Then I demand more. A full body massage."

Miraluka laid herself flat on the bed, dragging Hisui's arm without releasing him.

But Hisui did not agree.

"No, I'm not in the mood today."

"Then how about I give you one?"

Miraluka spoke mischievously, pulling Hisui's arm.

It was a light motion no matter how you looked at it, but because it was a vampire--a True Ancestor--'s power at night, Hisui was pulled into the air like a feather before falling on the bed.

The two of them swapped positions with Hisui lying face up and Miraluka climbing over him.

"...Hey."

"What?"

Miraluka rested her chin on her hand with her elbow on Hisui's chest as though asking "what's the problem?"

Her adorable action was very sexy.

Both of them were wearing their usual sleep wear.

Hisui was casually wearing a t-shirt and sweats while Miraluka was dressed in a negligee of black lace.

Due to the flimsy fabric, he could clearly see the outlines of her lingerie while her body warmth was within arm's reach.

However, a vampire's body temperature was much lower than a human's.

Sometimes people might describe vampires as bone-chilling cold but Miraluka could be considered the relatively warmer type.

Their heart rates gradually sped up in rhythm, body heat flowing between each other, their heart beats gradually synchronized.

"...Get off."

"Why? Why have you been so gloomy ever since I came back? Tell me if anything's bothering you."

"Nothing. If I had to say what's bothering me, it's the current situation. Also that crap you pulled in the bathroom just now!"

"What's there to be shy of between you and me?"

"I'm already... not a child."

Hisui turned his face away and reminisced.

Indeed, the two of them had frequently taken baths together in the past.

But once he reached the upper years of elementary school, Hisui started insisting on taking baths alone.

Miraluka did not care and would nonchalantly barge in while Hisui was taking baths. But once Hisui started middle school, she started showing more restraint.

Nevertheless, blatantly parading in the living room clad in nothing but a bath towel was everyday behavior for Miraluka. As a result, her so-called restraint probably amounted to little.

"I don't understand, what is troubling you so much?"

"It's only natural that an immortal vampire doesn't understand a young man's heart. Okay, hurry and get off me."

"You're leaving me more and more confused. What's troubling you? It's perfectly natural for men to lust after beauty. But given our relationship, do you still need to be shy? It's the law of nature for your age to advance with time. Since you've reached this age, pursuing me is only inevitable."

"...I don't get you. Come again?"

Without answering, Miraluka simply untied her negligee's shoulder strap.

The fabric over her chest slid down, revealing the bountiful bosom clad in her bra.

The bra and the negligee were both black but extremly skimpy in fabric.

This salacious underwear only barely managed to cover her nipples, existing only to seduce men.

Miraluka was a woman who loved wearing revealing underwear to begin with, but Hisui had never seen her dressed in such a provocative manner.

"Uh..."

"I used to have my neckline open like this all the time to play the mother's role."

"...Don't bring up those annoying memories."

"Like I said, there's nothing to be shy about. Or rather... I am precisely the one who deprived you of your mother."

"..."

Indeed.

The woman before his eyes, in intimate physical contact, was precisely the one who had murdered his parents.

While his parents were forcing him to commit suicide, she was the one who had rescued and raised him.

"My lifespan is limitless but I've never been a mother. Watching other people's mothers so much, it seems like I've learnt how to do it. Seeing you cry for mother, I became your mother... Not good enough for you?"

"...Like anyone knows. I don't have any good impressions of my birth mother anyway, even if I did, I don't remember it. I'm not so deprived of human values to think things are better just because you killed my parents... Neither will I hate you indiscriminately for it."

"It's the first time for me to hear you talk about this."

Miraluka smiled.

Indeed, Hisui was bringing this up to her for the first time.

He had never been able to speak about it.

Something so simple, he still could not bring himself to say it even till the day she died once.

"I'm no longer a kid who needs to stick to his mother all day... I don't need a second mother. You're just an elder sister at most, right...? Oh well, except much older."

"I see, you're right. But you were able to live independently while I was gone, so you don't even need an elder sister, right?"

"It's not like that... I don't want to depend on you all the time. I have the ability to live independently but I don't have the financial means."

Hisui was indeed used to living alone.

No matter what feelings he had in his heart, even if this mother and sister was not by his side, he was still able to make ends meet and live on.

"Then you don't need me?"

"No, that's not what I mean..."

"True. If I can't be family, there are still other uses for me."

Saying that, Miraluka picked up Hisui's right hand and moved it towards her chest.

"Hey..."

"You think I didn't notice? Ever since middle school, you deliberately avoided looking at me here. Why?"

"W-Well...!"

"Since I'm your mother or sister, you don't have to be self-conscious even if you looked at me there. There's no problem. On the other hand, I can't."

Miraluka pressed her breasts against Hisui and reached out to hold his hand.

Then pulling Hisui's hand, she unfastened her bra.

The fabric that almost failed to serve as underwear slid down, exposing the breasts to the air.

Like heavy fruit quivering on a branch, the soft flesh came spilling out with overwhelming volume.

Despite seeing them up close earlier, Hisui found that the white mammary flesh before his eyes was giving off a different kind of color.

The warmth coming from the breasts to his hand was no different from a human's.

The fruit on the tips of her breasts was already ripe, its stiffness something that Hisui could feel concretely.

Miraluka released Hisui's hand.

Right now, Hisui was touching her body using his own hand.

"Be my guest, do as you please."

"..."

"Over here as well."

Miraluka whispered in Hisui's ear, pulling his unoccupied left hand towards her buttocks.

Hisui's five fingers sank into her beautiful flesh that resembled a plain of snow.

Near his finger tips was the knot for her panties--The fabric there was as skimpy as the bra's.

Miraluka probably had made her mind up already when she called Hisui to her room.

"Miralu..."

Before he could call out, Hisui's lips were sealed.

She was already guilty of being a kissing demon in the past so this was not her first time doing this.

Nevertheless, today's kiss was differerent from all previous ones.

This kiss was unlike those meant to express amity, not coming from a mother or a sister, different from a kiss from family.

This was probably a kiss between a man and a woman.

Those lips, which should have drunk countless fresh blood, did not carry any of the stench of blood.

Instead, they were richly sweet.

This was a fragrance familiar to Hisui.

This fragrance had filled the entire room. Even the bed was giving off this seductive scent.

There was no longer any of Rushella's scent here.

That type soap fragrance, filled with luxury yet secretly containing a sense of modesty had already disappeared.

After the long kiss, Miraluka released their lips.

She allowed Hisui's hands to stay pressed against her breasts and buttocks, then reached out with both hands to cradle his head.

"What would you like to do? You may do anything you wish, okay?"

"..."

"Or perhaps... You'd like me to show off my seniority and guide you instead?"

Miraluka smiled gently and separated herself from Hisui for now.

Taking off her negligee, she began to slowly remove her panties in a teasing manner.

Miraluaka then pressed her weight on Hisui and quietly lifted his t-shirt's hem.

Pushing her breasts tightly against Hisui's skinny chest, their body temperatures merged together again.

Lips and lips approached again.

A blood-red tongue extended out from similarly colored lips.

This kiss was different from the previous one, richer, sweeter, a point of no return as soon as the kiss began.

Breathing into each other's face, they touched their lips lightly together.

Miraluka closed her eyes.

But Hisui opened his eyes wide.

"Stop...!"

Hisui pushed Miraluka as she leaned over.

Of course, Hisui's strength was completely powerless against a vampire at night.

But Miraluka silently got off the bed. Still completely naked, she asked expressionlessly:

"...Are you unsatisfied with me in any way?"

"..."

"In the end... Am I nothing more than family? Or I should know my place and be happy that a mere vampire was able to get this intimate with you?"

Still maintaining that expressionless look, her words were filled with bitterness.

A man capable of making her, a True Ancestor, speak in such a voice, could there exist another apart from him?

Under the heavy silence, Hisui spoke with resolve.

"Who on earth... are you?"

Miraluka frowned with displeasure.

This question had already been asked during their reunion.

And she had responded with a perfect answer.

This answer was not going to change even now.

"I am Miraluka, who else could I be? You should recognize my body too."

Miraluka spread her arms, displaying her nude body completely before Hisui's eyes.

He knew.

Eternal beauty was being carved into his eyes.

This body of porcelain, not off by the slightest, was definitely no replica.

His eyes could not be mistaken.

This was the body of the woman who stood as his mother, his elder sister and the one he loved.

However...

"Why?"

"What are you asking?"

"Your hand... Why isn't it fully healed?"

Sitting on the bed, Hisui stared grimly at Miraluka's right hand.

It was the hand with the burn.

Although her regeneration powers had taken some effect, the hand that had blocked the silver bullet was still marred by traces of severe burns.

"...I don't understand what you are asking. That was a silver bullet after all, healing takes time."

"You simply blocked the bullet. It did not enter your body so damage should be limited. And given your power, this level of injury can't be irrecoverable."

"I am a vampire, did you forget that? A wound from an ordinary bullet would heal instantly. But wounds caused by holy damage will leave permanent scars in the worst case scenario."

"Just like the 'kisses' of your kind, even if the wound is gouged out together with the flesh, the wound will reappear again when the spot regenerates... Like that?"

This was what Miraluka had told him before.

The "kiss mark" piercing the victims of vampires--This was a curse.

Unless the vampire was destroyed, the wound would never disappear.

Even using surgery to remove the flesh at the wound's location, the "kiss mark" would still regenerate.

This served precisely as the explanation that a vampire's "kiss" was no simple wound or infection but a magical curse.

The same phenomena occurred on vampires themselves.

When attacked by weapons with holy properties, permanent wounds were left on vampires in spite of their eternal life and youth.

This phenemonon depended on the interaction of various conditions including a vampire's rank, the depth of the wound, the power of the weapon, the user's strength and there was no simple answer but it really did exist.

"...How exaggerated. First of all, no one can verify permanent wounds. Supposing that kind of wound remained unclosed, perhaps it might grow shallower after a hundred years and even disappear after a thousand. For we vampires, waiting that long isn't a problem. After all, this isn't any severe injury to me, it'll be gone without a trace after a week."

"Perhaps, what you say ought to be true. That's why I found it strange."

"Why? It's a wound produced by a weapon meant to counter my kind. I can't help that."

"No. Perhaps it's true for other vampires, but you're different."

"..."

Miraluka fell silent.

She guessed what Hisui did not say aloud.

"Of course, this is also related to the fact that you're a True Ancestor. This level of minor injury not healing instantly feels abnormal. But before that, you probably possess the most potent regeneration powers of all vampires. You even survived after getting incinerated by sunlight. Will someone that powerful get burnt by blocking just a single silver bullet? And leave a scar behind?"

Miraluka wanted to say something but Hisui continued attacking verbally without relenting.

"Also... You have ample medical and nourishment supplies and more blood than you could ever finish using. You've stockpiled a large amount of blood in the basement, right? Although the blood for transfusion doesn't taste good, with so much blood, recovering to full health shouldn't be a problem at all. But your hand didn't recover."

"..."

"At least the Miraluka I knew would be able to heal this kind of minor wound instantly. So..."

"So I'm a fake? This doesn't even count as decisive evidence. Ultimately, the most crucial thing is whether you believe me or not."

Miraluka shook her head lightly.

There was sadness on her face.

"Since you suspect me, then you really ought to confirm with your body, right? I can't deceive you in that area."

Miraluka got on the bed again.

But while she was climbing onto the bed, Hisui jumped off.

Then he burst out of the door while Miraluka's shrill voice called out to him from behind.

It was the voice of his only family, the same as always in the past.

"I haven't changed, nowhere from head to foot. You're the one who changed, right?"

"What do you mean by that?"

Hisui feigned calmness but his voice was trembling.

"I live as evidence of my own existence, that's all. But that seems to be different for you."

"..."

"Come back any time you want me."

Hisui did not reply, he did not even look back.

Because he was unable to do anything, he could only choose to escape in this manner.

That morning, he fled the house.

"...So you came running to my home? Have you no shame?"

Early Sunday morning, Eruru was mocking him unhappily in the living room of her own apartment.

Eruru was sitting on the sofa. Hisui was sitting on the floor with embarrassment all over his face, in stark contrast to her.

"By the way, why did you run over to my home just because you are feeling uncomfortable in your home? If you go to Sudou-san's or Uno-san's, they will gladly receive you."

"Sudou's home... I feel like she'll surely make all sorts of demands for me to repay her. As for Senpai... I don't want to trouble her family."

"You came to me because I live alone? Then I shall be frank, you are very annoying."

"...I am in the wrong."

Hisui could not find any rebuttal.

Afraid of being alone with Miraluka in the same room, he had no choice but to escape.

He was even thoughtful enough to bring his usual school uniform, how lame.

But Hisui had an excuse to come here.

"About Miraluka... Do you have any news on your side?"

"..."

"None of you three answered my texts yesterday, I was worried... Did something happen?"

Hisui carefully chose his words to pursue the matter.

Eruru told him the truth with a scowl.

"Noting much. Right now, the possibility of uncovering a crime seems very difficult. But I believe she is the type of gray that is very close to black."

"I see..."

"Also, we were too busy with other things yesterday to respond."

"What, did something happen?"

"We encountered Rushella."

Hisui's face changed with alarm then settled down.

Eruru continued mercilessly.

"I shall be brief with the details of what transpired. She ran all the way to the Supernatural Investigations Section to investigate her origins but failed to find any clues. Then she left."

"Really...? Then where is she now!?"

Hisui looked up and asked emotionally.

But seeing Eruru's ice-cold gaze, he shut up again.

"What would you do if you knew?"

"What do you mean, what..."

"She left you most likely out of her own accord. Judging from yesterday's situation, no one was forcing or and she did not have any companions with her either. Since she is determined to leave, what can you do?"

"Well..."

"I shall ask again. Is she irreplaceable to you?"

A cruel question.

Why find Rushella? Hisui had been trying to answer this question himself all along.

Had it been earlier, Hisui would surely have answered in a half joking manner, "don't ask the obvious, this doesn't need a reason."

But now...

"She feels that you do not need her anymore, that is why she left. Surely you must have reached this conclusion, right?"

This question made Hisui felt like his heart was being stabbed by knives. Eruru knew that.

Precisely because of that, she brought this up without emotion.

"To you two... No, to Rushella-san, do you not feel that this is a painful matter?"

Eruru's every word was merciless.

Standing in the intermediate territory between humans and vampires, she knew very well how difficult it was for the two races to coexist.

Let alone the fact that there was Miraluka by Hisui's side.

Hisui did not answer and kept his head down.

Clenching his fist, gnashing his teeth, he felt like his heart was running amok with all sorts of emotions.

The silence persisted and still Hisui did not answer.

"She is currently very dangerous seeing as she has not drunk any blood apparently. I feel that she does not have the body type that can endure well, so the situation is quite bad. If she continues to abstain from blood, she will go mad sooner or later."

Eruru stood up and spoke.

"If that happens... Will the Supernatural Investigations Section handle it?"

"I will not deny it. But just as you know, destroying a rampaging vampire is quite tricky. To be honest, it would be better to find her first and make her drink blood no matter what. Oh well, it would be pointless if she refuses and spits the blood out. Hence if you want my opinion, it would be best to have a source of blood by her side that she prefers."

"You..."

Hearing the true message in Eruru's words, Hisui stared blankly at her.

"Her whereabouts are not known exactly, but I have already narrowed down the approximate area. Since she visited the Supernatural Investigations Section once, then it would be best to trace things from the MPD as a start. If she took some kind of transportation, there will be records left behind. If she escaped on foot, there will be eye witnesses. After all, her appearance is so striking that questioning witness for clues will not be heard. In any case, I already have an idea where she could be hiding."

"Where is... that place!?"

"Apparently in a neighboring town. I never expected it to be so near."

Eruru's tone of voice was grave and her expression did not relax.

"Hmm, well... Okay, why did she pick this strange place? It's neither hiding in plain sight nor totally impossible to guess... This distance is totally easy to catch up."

"Wanting to avoid going far as much as possible yet not wanting to be found by you... I believe that is what she is thinking."

"...Can I give my honest opinion?"

"Go ahead."

"What a pain."

"I agree."

The two of them nodded.

Hisui seemed to be pulling himself together.

"Then... I shall be going out to investigate. If you have nothing to do, then please feel free to relax here as much you like."

"...I'll go too. Why are you asking the obvious?"

"I do not read minds."

Then the two of them left together.

Still on Hisui's face was gloom that could not be washed away.

Meeting up with Mei and Kirika who were waiting in front of the station, the team returned to their usual lineup.

"By the way, are you girls doing something behind my back? Sudou looks injured. If it's about finding Rushella, isn't it totally mean to keep me in the dark?"

"Who knows, what about you, Senpai?"

"I am simply accompanying Kariya-san, right, Kariya-san?"

"I do not have any time or energy to waste on a useless person who wallows in his own troubles. Do not count him. The three of us must do our best."

"What kind of treatment is this...?"

Eruru seemed like she got off the wrong side of the bed today.

Feeling highly indignant, Hisui followed the group to the crowded main road in front of the station.

"Umm... We're going to start searching from here? But there's the problem of where to go, do you have any clues to the specific location?"

"She definitely passed by this station yesterday, but the trail broke off afterwards. If she has not left this place, she should be within walking distance still."

Eruru herself did not seem to have definitive clues either, entering deep thought.

The four of them handed out missing person notices while asking in the subway, but these efforts were hardly rewarded.

Suppose Rushella saw them from a distance, she would surely hide immediately.

"But investigating in secret is very limiting in all aspects..."

Mei began to think.

Kirika also tried to help think of a solution.

At this time, Hisui discovered an uninvited participant.

"Oh."

"What is the matter?"

Hearing his voice, Eruru followed his gaze.

Then she saw as well.

Standing in the street smugly with her arms akimbo--Rangetsu.

"Hmph, looks like you lot are in quite a bind, aren't you?"

" " " "No, not at all." " " "

The four of them denied simultaneously then started to leave.

"Anyway, let us set a meeting time then split up to gather information. I will check out the net cafe."

"I guess I'll go to abandoned houses and empty shops."

"Then I'll check out restaurants and convenience stores. Maybe she went to buy things a few times."

"Then I will go to other public places where she might have turned up. Perhaps she went to a community center that is open to the public for free..."

The four of them made specific plans.

Just as they confirmed one another's division of roles and prepared to disperse, Rangetsu grabbed all their collars at once from the back.

"Hey, why are you ignoring me!? To think I came all the way out here to help...!!"

"It's not like we asked you."

"Say, why are you here?"

"Are you acting as a representative of the Supernatural Investigations Section? A spy?"

"Umm, we're acting privately here."

The four of them rejected her.

All of them were giving vibes of sending her off.

"What is the meaning of this!? And how do you intend to search!? With just the few of you, even though the Supernatural Investigations Section was unable to spare any manpower due to yesterday's incident, but without using mass tactics, you still won't find anything even by dusk, you know!?"

"No, we've already reached a conclusion. We know it's difficult but if we don't take action then we'll never find her."

Hisui rebutted with reason.

Rangetsu was clearly displeased that her plan was foiled.

"Umm, then if you're goin to search, the more helpers the better... Right?"

Rangetsu twisted awkwardly, looking with pleading eyes and leaning over.

To be frank, this type of approach did not suit her image at all, totally not cute.

Hisui distanced himself from her in an exaggerated manner while the other three retreated as well.

"Hey, why are you evading!?"

"Uh, you're too conspicuous and your voice is loud."

"We're just a group of students, what are you thinking, trying to butt into our center?"

"...May I ask if you are trying to get us to recruit you into our team?"

"Stop acting pretentiously."

In the end, Kirika murmured with pity.

Scorned by this group of youngsters, Rangetsu roared with her face red.

"L-Let's see who's going to succeed! Since you've said this much, I'll go search on my own, I'll show you when I find her, just you wait and see! Remember that!"

"Then go search. Let's just do our best, separately."

"Just don't get into our way, okay?"

"Good luck."

Hisui and Mei saw her off with blank expressions.

Kirika waved behind them.

Unable to go back on her words, Rangetsu asked them in a small voice:

"...You're not going to ask me to stay?"

"Huh? Aren't you the one saying you're gonna leave?"

"Competition drives motivation."

"We never called you here in the first place."

The three of them rejected her without holding back.

Their eyes looked like they were trying to drive her off.

Stuck in an awkward position, Rangetsu stood there frozen, at a loss what to do. At this moment, Eruru extended a helping hand.

"Well, everyone please wait first. Regrettably, she does have strengths that we lack, so we should ask for her help right now. How about it, Rangetsu, will you make use of your talent?"

Eruru suddenly changed attitudes dramatically and became polite in tone.

Rangetsu also seemed to get happy, puffing out her chest and nodding.

"Fine, fine. I can see that you're facing a tough situation too. What do you want me to do? What is my specialty anyway?"

Instead of answering, Eruru took out a piece of clothing in a plastic bag from her hand carry bag.

No matter how Hisui looked at it, the garment was a uniform from Hisui's school--And a female one at that.

"What is this...?"

"Just as you can see, a uniform."

"No, of course I know that, but what do you want me to do? And whose is this?"

"Rushella-san left it behind. She apparently departed in her own clothing without taking this or her gym clothes, probably because she felt that she no longer needed them."

Eruru spoke aloofly.

Rangetsu and Hisui gradually figured out Eruru's intentions.

"Then... What are you doing with it?"

"Sniff it then find Rushella-san's whereabouts according to the scent."

"What!? You're ordering me around like I'm a police dog!?"

Rangetsu grabbed the uniform and threw it on the floor.

Her dignity had been denied by others in various ways.

"Hey, what are you doing? Don't let it get contaminated by other odors, that'll waste all earlier efforts, right!?"

Hisui frantically picked up the clothing.

Luckily, it did not touch the ground directly, being isolated by a plastic bag.

"Shut up! Although my sense of smell is indeed as keen as a dog's, to find a person... No, to find a vampire is as easy as pie, but why do I have to do a dog's job!?"

"Hmm? I think it's using talent appropriately."

"So true. And didn't you just agree to help?"

"A police officer is going back on her word?"

Hisui, Mei and Kirika stared at her.

Eruru simply watched coldly form the sidelines, pretending like it had nothing to do with her.

Rangetsu was about to cry, with only herself to blame for saying things without forethought.

But she was a police officer after all. Of course she knew very well that this was their best course of action given the current circumstances.

With only a moment's hesitation, Rangetsu buried her face into the uniform.

She sniffed hard then looked around with a displeased face.

Sniffing, Rangetsu finally locked her gaze on a certain point.

"...This way, no mistake about it! Hurry and go!"

She ran at full speed as though venting her frustrations.

Hisui and the others knew they could not match her speed and could only hurry in pursuit as fast as they could.

The crowd opened up a path for Rangetsu, serving as a sign that prevented Hisui's group from losing her.

While chasing her, Hisui asked Eruru helplessly.

"...You must have calculated this from the start, right? You kept your mouth shut all along, is this the strategy of good cop, bad cop?"

"Using a harsh and intimidating interrogator to scare the suspect then sending a benevolent colleague to apply restraint, then the suspect will cooperate and spill the beans. This is an trick frequently seen in crime dramas. But I never thought it would work so thoroughly on a police officer in service."

"After Rushella disappeared, you took away the things she left behind, that was for this?"

"Since she is a vampire after all, I do not want to use ordinary police hounds. Apart from that, she is the best choice since she can pinpoint Rushella-san's location to a certain extent, able to use a dog's sense of smell should the opportunity arise, stronger than a dog yet it does not matter if she dies in an accident."

"Are you truly a demon?"

Hisui absolutely did not want to be her enemy.

Chatting like this, they ran after Rangetsu's trail.

Keeping her high speed, she soon reached an area with few people.

There were very few pedestrian in this place that was in the shadows in between the gaps of tall buildings.

Seeing this scene, it was very easy for someone to conclude this was vampire territory out of preconceived notions.

After a moment's hesitation, Rangetsu stopped in front of some ruins.

Although the ruins themselves were unrecognizable, judging from the building's decorations it was still possible to guess its original look.

This place... was most likely the ruins of a church.

"...The smell here is very chaotic. But at least, she must have spent a long period of time here recently. But probably not inside the church, let's go check nearby net cafes first..."

"No, start here. Japan has very few churches that can actually repel vampires."

"Judging from her personality, she'd probably try to be contrary and deliberately chose to treat the most dangerous place as the safest spot."

"As a dhampir, I can feel that there is no problem with this building, almost completely harmless."

"Then let's go."

The group ignored the embarrassed Rangetsu and entered the interior of the building.

There were nothing holy inside and all the articles with the church's symbols had all been moved away already.

The light inside was very dim and even in the daytime, sunlight did not reach inside.

It would not be surprising for demonic entities to lurk in this place.

Judging from the exterior of the building, it looked more like a hidden lair for supernatural entities.

But the place was empty, devoid of other presences.

However, the five of them did not lower their guard. Checking their surroundings, they searched in different directions.

Especially examining the floor, Eruru narrowed her eyes.

"There are clear and distinct footprints in the dust. Since it has not been covered by new dust..."

"That means someone visited recently..."

In charge of searching the forward direction, Hisui heightened his vigilance.

At this moment, the sound of floorboards being pulled apart could be heard ahead.

Then there was the sound of footsteps on stairs.

Someone was coming up from underground.

There was movement in the space several meters ahead.

Shrouded deeply in shadows, there was definitely something up ahead.

The five of them readied their positions, made a gesture for silence and bided their time.

Then Eruru took out a small flashlight she was carrying and shone the light forward.

At the same time, the sound of rustling clothing came from the front.

Looking at the ground, there was a familiar garment--especially to Hisui.

This was a part of the school's prescribed uniform--His shirt as well as Rushella's pajamas.

Hisui recalled that Rushella had definitely taken it when she disappeared.

Thanks to that, Hisui had to spend money again--Sigh, whatever, that no longer mattered.

Since the pajamas was taken off, it meant that someone was in the process of changing.

In fact, next to her was a formal dress and underwear folded neatly.

In other words... She was currently nude.

Illuminated by the flashlight's dazzling radiance, Rushella's pale nude body was exposed completely before the entire group.

Standing in front was Hisui.

This reunion was quite unsightly, to say the least.

Voluptuous bosom, narrow waist, tight and elastic buttocks, slender and beautiful legs--Everything was in clear view of Hisui.

Just as everyone was petrified, Hisui timidly... said in a loud voice.

"Hello again..."

"DON'T LOOOOOOOOOK!!"

A shrill scream echoed indoors as Rushella picked up the shirt on the ground and threw it at him.

Not only Hisui but everyone else's vision was blocked.

Rushella seized this instant to rapidly put on her clothes.

Without caring about fixing up her disheveled appearance, she escaped outside like a puff of smoke.

"Hey, wait up!"

Hisui chased after her.

Speedy Rangetsu and Mei also followed but were blocked by Eruru.

"Do not follow, just leave it to him here. If we are to chase them, we should take detours to cut off her escape in a pincer formation. Most likely, her coffin is still here so she will eventually return. Just leave one person to standby here. Uno-senpai, can I rely on you for that?"

"Yes, sure..."

Receiving the orders, Kirika moved a folding chair that was leaning against a wall over and sat down.

"Then we should set off and start the game of hide and seek."

"...Even if you say that, you actually hope for Hi-kun to catch her, right? Even if I can't catch up, Oogami's speed can surely catch up to her."

"You are overthinking things. Let us go."

Eruru ignored Mei's remarks and walked out of the building.

The two of them set off in directions different from where Rushella had run off. At this moment, someone who did not understand finally could not tolerate any further.

"Hey what's the big idea here? Why won't you let me, a werewolf, chase her? A vampire during daytime is totally no match for my speed..."

"...You are very annoying."

"What do you mean!? It's all thanks to me that you were able to search to this place..."

"Yes yes, good job. Oogami, you really don't understand a man's heart~"

"What did you say!?"

Hearing Mei's taunt, Rangetsu turned her antagonism towards her.

"You girls, what are you doing blocking a competent adult like me here for--"

"Oogami."

Mei suddenly stared at her with serious eyes.

Rangetsu tilted her head in puzzlement while Mei patted her shoulder.

"You're a virgin, right?"

"HUHHHHH!?"

"...Rather, you've never gotten along with men much, have you?"

Mei dropped the bomb.

She was totally looking down on this senior from a high position.

Although their actual experience were on the same level, Mei held an overwhelming advantage in her stored knowledge and honed skills.

"W-What rubbish are you talking about? Back in the day..."

"Back in the day?"

"...Back in the day when I was in the werewolve's hidden settlement, I was quite the popular one... I guess."

"May I ask what the gender ratio was? I've heard that among werewolves, men make up the vast majority?"

Eruru mercilessly exposed her.

She was truly cold-blooded during times like these.

"Wanting to find a mate, you left your homeland and finally arrived at the MPD, right? Then have you found a mate?"

Mei struck the final blow.

"......Not yet."

Rangetsu looked up sadly into the sky.

Today's sky was truly blue and clear.

But as luck would have at, several clouds blocked her view.

These obstructing dark clouded perhaps reflected her inner feelings right now.

Mei and Eruru left the demoralized Rangetsu behind and quickly departed.

"How pitiful... Disregarding whether she's a monster, looks like it's hopeless for her. A Christmas cake. Eruru-chan, you'd better be careful too❤"

"Do not compare me with her...!"

Eruru seemed really mad as she rushed out in a huff.

"Hey wait!"

Hisui yelled as he ran.

But running in front, Rushella had no intention of stopping.

She ran as hard as she could, neither making use of small alleys nor buildings to evade Hisui, simply trying to shake him off through sheer stamina and speed.

Running aimlessly, her path was naturally hindered by pedestrians and cars but she did not care.

As luck would have it, because Rushella was opening a path ahead, Hisui did not have any trouble following the space opened by the pedestrians to let her pass. Furthermore, Rushella was holding a parasol and the air resistance was limiting her speed like a natural set of brakes.

In spite of all that, the distance between the two of them did not shrink.

Although the sun had yet to set, this was only expected seeing as his opponent was a vampire.

A question soon appeared in Hisui's mind after he chased for a while.

Her speed was definitely fast.

But he still managed to barely keep up.

She did not look like she was deliberately going easy on him but this was surely not her true level of power.

Very likely, she had not drunk any blood ever since she left him.

Apart from that reason, something inside her seemed to be weakening on a fundamental level.

Hisui had this feeling.

Currently, Rushella was nothing more than an ordinary girl who could run fast.

Perhaps her level would make her one-in-a-hundred among high school students, capable of matching a track and field athlete from a renowned school.

However...

"My sides are starting to hurt..."

The key point was that the pursuer sucked too much.

A loser in sprinting matches to begin with, he was not good at long distance running either, plus his sides were hurting more and more.

In fact, in the entire Rushella search team, he had the shortest legs.

The sight of Rushella's back was getting increasingly distant, soon about to disappear.

"Hold on and wait!"

Hisui yelled with the last strength he could squeeze out but most likely she did not hear it.

Even if she heard, surely she would not stop either.

Just as Hisui was at a loss, he felt a cold feeling on his face.

He could not help but stop and look up into the sky.

Raindrops instantly fell on his face.

Not long ago, there were only a few scattered clouds in the sky but now it was covered with dark clouds.

Then the raindrops turned into a downpour.

The torrent of raindrops smashed against Hisui's entire body.

This was an unexpected disaster. The pedestrians in the surroundings all used their bags or luggage to cover their heads or ran under the shelter of eaves.

But for Hisui, this rain came with perfect timing.

Catching his breath, he started running again.

The wind and rain struck him in the face.

Even with an umbrella, walking would be difficult in this kind of raging wind.

But for Hisui, this opportunity was a gift from heaven.

Because if it was merely rain, Rushella was not going to stop running.

A slowed down metabolism would make her decelerate somewhat but her parasol also doubled as an ordinary umbrella. Rainwater alone was not going to halt her footsteps.

Stopping to find shelter from the rain would risk getting found.

Hence, she could only continue to run.

All she could do was run nonstop, running until she had shaken Hisui off her trail completely.

However.

With wind, it was a totally different ballgame.

Blown horizontally, the rainwater evaded the parasol surface, striking her body.

Living water of natural origins was a taboo for vampires.

Even without causing critical injuries, it would slow down her entire body's biological activity. In the worst case, it would turn her into something like a corpse.

The sudden rainstorm could be considered a gift for Hisui.

Hence, he did not stop either.

Ignoring the slippage underfoot, the drenched outer clothing, he simply raced across the streets.

Then he finally found her.

"This has happened before too."

Before his eyes was Rushella collapsed in the streets.

Although she was holding a parasol, the rainwater attacking from the side battered her body all over.

She still tried to distance herself from Hisui, thus ending up in this state.

"You really know how to make trouble for others."

Hisui smiled wryly as he cradled Rushella in his arms.

However, Rushella weakly pushed his arm away.

"...What?"

"So noisy, get away from me...!"

"Don't put on a tough front, you're clearly so weak already. Have you been drinking blood properly? But no, you can't drink irresponsibly."

"Shut up, I don't need your help..."

Rushella shut her mouth in protest, her voice so weak it was barely audible.

Crawling on the ground, she managed with great difficulty to move herself under a building's shade to avoid the corrosion of rainwater. However, all this only served to indicate how weak and vulnerable she was right now.

"Oh my, I told you to stop putting up a tough front. Especially when you're clearly a vampire."

"Hmph... B-By this point, what business do you have that you need to find me!?"

"...Well, it's not business exactly... You must let me know before going out."

Finally a reunion with her after much difficulty but face to face, he did not know what to say.

Why did he have to find her? What next after he found her? Hisui never considered these questions at all.

"M-Money, I already left it for you! That's the rent for everything up to now! Or you find it too little? What a greedy miser!"

"Considering all the trouble you've caused me, perhaps it might really not be enough, but ignoring the question of money first, you should at least say something before leaving! Why on earth... did you leave?"

This was actually quite difficult for Hisui to ask.

Hisui had guessed the reason vaguely... But in the end, he still wanted to hear the answer straight from her mouth.

"...I-It's because, I've grown tired of living with you! I-I wanted to live... a-a more exciting and eventful life!"

"Are you a new bride weary of married life? Leaving home in search of thrills?"

"You're being noisy, shut up! E-Even if I stayed with you, I totally can't find my memories or any clues at all, so...!"

"Are you an office lady going on a trip on a search for self-discovery? Then come on, go take a flight overseas, like to Europe for example. Going to the neighboring town, what the heck! Somewhere so close by, what's the difference compared to the area where you searched for your memories previously!?"

Hisui yelled loudly, pouring out these things that should not be said.

Rushella grew tearful and began to beat on him.

"You're noisy, shut up!! You clearly didn't come to find me!"

"What the heck!? Since you hid yourself, even if it was just the empty house next door, I'm not going to be able to find you, right!?"

"Shut up, shut up!! After all, you surely never searched seriously for me, right!?"

"But I searched through hell and high water! And you hid yourself so well, doesn't that mean you didn't want to be found!? Also, you kept running until just now!"

"Shut up, you're not allowed to blame me if you didn't try your best!"

Rushella sent a splendid right straight into Hisui's face.

The rainwater drenched Rushella's fist so it was not particularly painful... But this still made Hisui's temper explode.

"...That's enough from you! You'd better start thinking in other people's shoes! Do you know how worried I was...!"

Mid sentence, Hisui stopped

Biting her lip, Rushella looked at him.

Her shoulders were trembling.

Her eyes were filled with tears.

"Liar..."

Her angry voice sounded like vengeful noises from underground. Hisui did not know how to answer.

Wiping her tears on the back of her hand, Rushella began to hammer her fists on Hisui's face again.

"In any case, you surely have no need for me! You're surely getting intimate with that woman!"

"..."

"You should search more seriously! You should chase harder! You should... You should..."

By the time he realized it, Rushella had stopped moving her hands.

Striking a final punch on Hisui's chest, she bowed her head and did not say a word.

Looking at her, Hisui turned to look towards the side and muttered a word.

"Annoying..."

Hearing him, Rushella suddenly looked up with a vicious visage.

"What did you say!?"

"Do you know how much your stupid matter troubled me for so long, totally annoying!"

"...Well I'm so sorry! Very well, this counts as my farewell to you! I'll investigate my own affairs. This time... This time it really is goodbye for good!"

No sooner had Rushella yelled out these words, Hisui hugged her tightly.

He pressed her mouth against his chest, causing Rushella's thoughts to stall.

But immediately, she began yelling again.

"W-What are you doing!? After all, I'm making trouble for you right now, aren't I!?"

"Yeah, it's trouble, super troublesome. This particular moment is really very troublesome."

"...Then unhand me! After all, I'm just trouble, right!?"

Hisui gave in to her demand and released Rushella.

Their faces were right next to each other.

Hisui was showing his usual unmotivated face as he said indifferently:

"Don't go running off so casually."

Rushella was stunned.

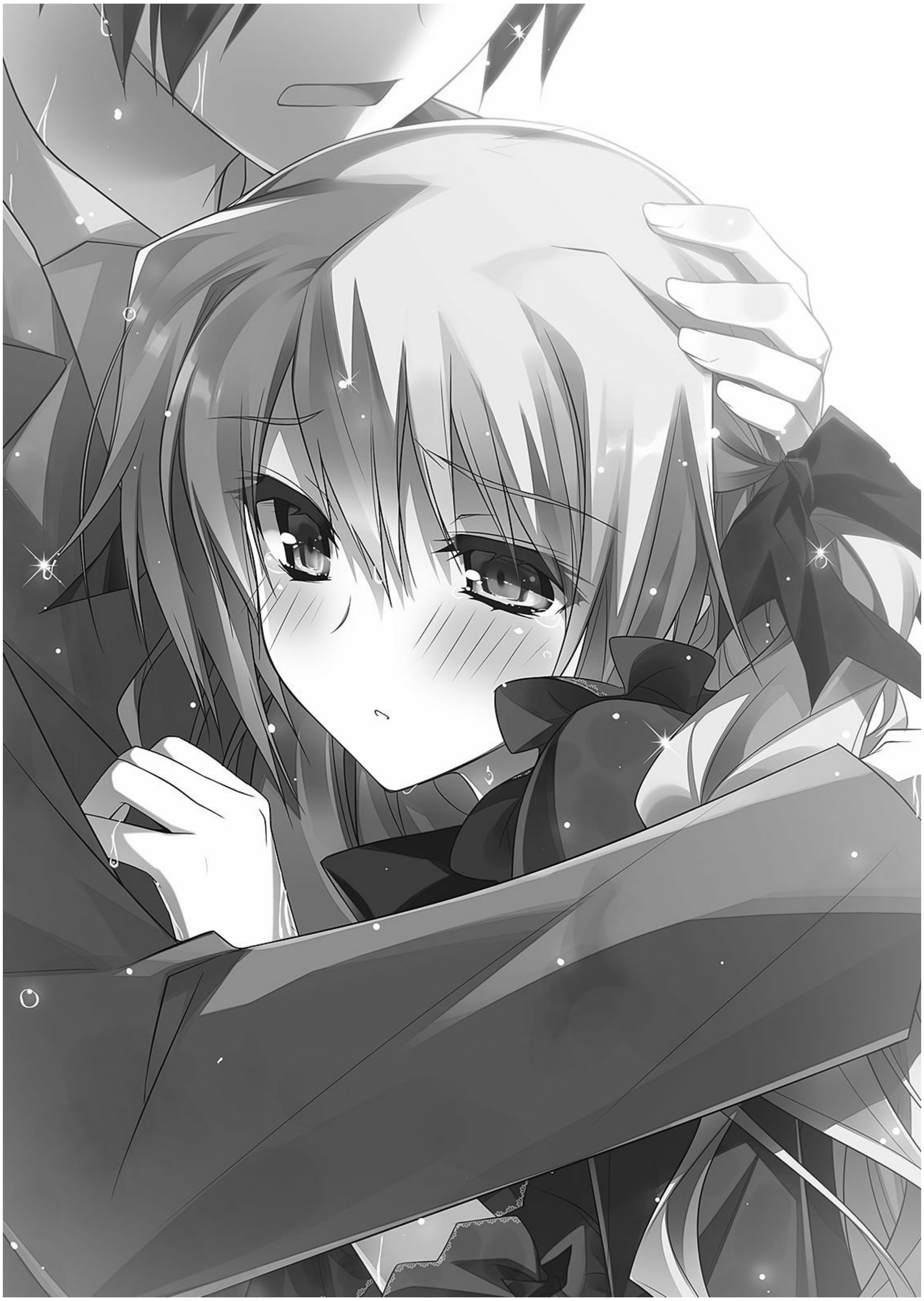
By the time they noticed, the rain had stopped already.

"...You running off is actually the most troublesome of all."

Sighing, Hisui hugged Rushella again.

This time was different, a very warm embrace.

Rushella finally broke down.



Large teardrops were pouring out like water from a ruptured dam. Her entire face was distorted from her crying.

Then--She began to hammer her fists on Hisui's face and chest.

Like a child, she only knew how to use her fists to vent the myriad feelings in her heart.

"Hey, it hurts, show some mercy, Rushella-san, it really hurts a lot! Cry or hit, pick one, okay!? No wait, I'd rather you not pick either!"

"So noisy, shut up...!"

Rushella said lightly then reached out with her arms around Hisui's back to embrace him.

Then she squeezed his body hard, clamping him half dead as though not letting him escape.

"Hey, it really hurts! Stop it, get away! Release me now!"

"No."

"Umm, this is out in the open streets!"

"NO!"

Sigh, this vampire is so annoying.

But Hisui gave up after some thought, wearing a wry smile while allowing her to embrace him.

Luckily, there was no one nearby.

There was even a road for motorized vehicles and this main road was supposed to have many pedestrians but for some reason, no one came at all.

This isn't bad at all--Just as Hisui thought that, a voice filled with exasperation was heard from behind.

"What are you two doing?"

Hisui looked back in surprise, only to see someone dressed in a black inverness(!) dress, walking elegantly towards them, her skirt hem fluttering in the wind.

Miraluka.

Her snow-white skin was glittering brightly, clearly wearing a light-blocking agent.

The sky was already sunny with sunlight passing through the clouds, scattering all over. Completely unfazed, she was walking under the sun.

Rushella and Miraluka stared at each other with Hisui standing in the middle.

The blood-red light of lightning shook the atmosphere as two True Ancestors encountered each other here.

Chapter 5 - True Ancestor versus True Ancestor

"You...!"

Holding a parasol, Rushella took a step forward, her eyes filled with hostility.

"Hugging publicly out on the streets, my, you've surely grown up."

It was impossible to tell from Miraluka's tone whether it was praise or exasperation.

Perhaps it was both.

Embarrassed, Hisui looked back and forth between the two vampires.

"Why did you come here...?"

"I was taking a walk nearby then heard a commotion so I came to check it out. Then... I saw you two."

"Surely you can come up with a better excuse? You must have followed me, right? If you used the mystic eyes, it'd be easy as pie."

Ignoring Hisui's accusations, Miraluka took a step forward as well.

Rushella glared at her with displeasure.

"You came at the right time. I've got things I need to make clear to you!"

"What?"

"This guy is mine!!"

Pointing at Hisui, Rushella announced proudly.

"No no, I'm free and independent."

Hisui calmly refuted but Rushella ignored him.

Finally, she managed to return to her former state.

"So noisy, so shut up! Know that you are my servant and you'll dedicate yourself to me fully from now on!!"

"I can't believe you can say that so shamelessly after causing me so much trouble! Also..."

Hisui could not bring himself to say "also in front of Miraluka" out loud.

Timidly, he looked at Miraluka but she remained unfazed.

She did not seem to mind.

Not only that, she was extending her right hand with a smile.

"W-What are you doing!?"

Unable to understand her intent, Rushella asked warily.

"Since sunlight is such a pain to both of us and standing out here to talk isn't convenient, how about we go home to talk? In any case, let's find a cool and shady spot."

"Well... Sure. But you're surprisingly calm. What, you don't mind Hisui being my servant?"

Rushella asked proudly.

She was completely unaware of the danger.

But Hisui was scared shitless.

The right hand Miraluka extended was the one whose skin had been burnt.

Spreading her fingers, her action looked like she was about to pierce Rushella's left chest.

"Run for it!"

Hearing Hisui's warning, Rushella reflexively retreated.

Miraluka's right hand passed through empty space.

Luckily, her hand only managed to graze the clothing on Rushella's chest. What she ripped out was only fragments of Rushella's brassiere and did not harm any flesh.

"...!?"

Rushella looked down in shock.

With her clothing ripped at the chest, her left breast had popped out.

Before feeling embarrassment, she first experienced fear.

On that pale and voluptuous, supple flesh, a faint scratch mark appeared.

Then the scratch mark slowly thickened, turning into a thin red line.

Had she evaded a beat slower, Rushella's left breast would surely have been struck.

A fist-sized hollow would probably be hollowed out from her chest.

"What's the meaning of this!?"

Faced with Hisui's questioning, Miraluka followed up with an attack to substitute for an answer.

Her attack was identical to just now.

Rushella was covering her chest, unable to fight back at all. Seeing that she was unable to evade or defend against the next strike no matter what, her face displayed fear.

At the last moment, a figure rushed over to block Miraluka.

"What are you doing? Exposing a breast to seduce Hi-kun?"

"You...!"

Mei had hurried over. Stepping up to shield Rushella, she had protected her.

"Hey, my dear mother, although this brat doesn't know her manners, aren't you going a bit too far? Or is this a woman's jealousy?"

"Step aside."

Miraluka said emotionlessly, ignoring Hisui.

A battle between a vampire and an artificial human was about to start--However, it was not one against one.

"This ends here."

Eruru appeared standing behind Miraluka.

The sacred gun Argentum was already aimed at Miraluka. If she continued to take action, Eruru would surely fire--That was what her eyes conveyed resolutely.

"While chasing Rushella-san, I noticed that the crowd was thinning out in this area. By the time I reached this place, there were no other people. You used the mystic eyes to drive all bystanders away, what are your intentions?"

Miraluka shrugged at Eruru's question.

Without turning her head back, she answered tirelessly.

"What am I doing? Since this is a matter between vampires, whatever I do is my freedom, yes? So long as it does not involve humans, conflict between monsters should not be interfered with. Isn't that your organization's policy? So what does this have to do with you?"

Poked in a vulnerable spot, Eruru made a displeased expression.

Miraluka was very correct.

It was a conflict between vampires. Just let them kill each other and get killed on their own.

If they ended up with mutual destruction, it would save her the task and also reduce the number of people with tragic experiences like her.

However...

Eruru glanced at Rushella and Hisui then said calmly.

"This is friendship between classmates... You are overthinking things."

"Who do you think I am doing this for? For this imposter... Or for Hisui?"

Eruru frowned unhappily and signaled to Mei with her eyes.

"Okay!"

Instantly, bright light erupted from Mei's eyes.

Two scorching beams of light shot at Miraluka's face.

Howver, Miraluka turned to one side and dodged.

While facing Mei's lasers, it was even more important to stay vigilant of Eruru behind her.

In fact, when Miraluka was taking evasive action, Eruru had pulled the trigger at the same time.

Mei and Eruru had discussed tactics beforehand, deciding on this pincer attack conducted in quick succession.

"How naive."

Miraluka blocked the bullet completely effortlessly. Closing in instantaneously, she blocked Argentum's muzzle.

With that, the gun was neutralized.

Eruru would lose as long as the gun was damaged before she fired her second shot.

Just as everyone present thought Eruru was going to lose, she laughed fearlessly.

"Who says that I only have one gun?"

Only then did Miraluka notice that Eruru was holding another gun in her left hand.

This gun's design was almost identical to Argentum's but slightly smaller with a narrower caliber.

A weapon prepared for emergencies in advance, prioritizing ease of concealment over power.

Eruru never intended to defeat her enemy using Argentum alone.

All was for this occasion.

Eruru pulled the trigger. The second bullet shot out from the gun in her left.

She had never dual wielded before, but this time, her tactic was correct.

The bullet was shot at the left of Miraluka's chest--Then it penetrated her body!

"Miraluka!"

Hisui wanted to run over.

But Miraluka did not collapse.

She staggered then stabilized herself immediately, using karate chops to strike down Eruru's dual guns. Then kicking away the guns that had fallen on the ground, she forced Eruru to withdraw.

Confirming that Eruru had no other backup guns, Miraluka casually walked over to Rushella.

There was a clear bullet hole on the left breast but she did not seem injured.

"Looks like there's no choice but to fight. But why is she unharmed?"

Mei was surprised but had no time to figure it out.

This was not arm wrestling but a battle with their lives on the line. One side was definitely going to lose and die. Mei's face was solemn as though facing a great enemy.

"Get out of the way quickly."

Hisui suddenly rushed over and shoved her aside.

Because it happened so suddenly, Mei was knocked down by the weak and skinny Hisui, falling over completely.

"Hey, what are you doing!?"

Ignoring Mei's protest, Hisui stepped up to take her place.

Hugging tightly Rushella who was standing rooted to the spot, he faced off against Miraluka.

This action caused even Miraluka to get angry.

Knocking Hisui unconsious and pulling him away from Rushella would be very easy, but he was surely going to resist and possibly get hurt.

"Step aside, Hisui."

"No."

"...When did you gain the guts to oppose me?"

Miraluka was questioning Hisui as his family, his mother and older sister.

Hearing that, hesitation flashed in Hisui's eyes. But as soon as he looked at Rushella who was still trembling after getting drenched in the rain, he steeled his determination.

"And when did you start getting serious with the young ones? That's even worse than acting childish. I really wanna ask... Who the heck are you? Does she really rub you the wrong way? Because I brought a girl home to live with while you were gone... Do you see her as an eyesore?"

It pained Hisui to say these things.

Hisui knew that Miraluka was not going to react well to this.

In her shoes, he would surely get angry too.

Coming home to find another woman sleeping in her bed.

It might be possible to tolerate as a mother or a sister.

But Miraluka, she was...

Hisui recalled what happened last night in the bedroom.

That supple body, the sensation of her breasts, her crimson lips, none of that could be dispelled from his mind.

"Although it's really embarrassing, I have to say this."

Hisui sounded like he was trying to convince himself as well.

"After you died... I was living in a daze like I had lost my soul."

He came to understand all this after that occasion when he got to have a dialogue with himself.

After conversing with his other self, his doppelganger, only then did he realize.

"I originally planned to pull myself together after entering high school... But nothing really changed, fundamentally. Until I met this girl."

Pointing at Rushella, Hisui smiled wryly.

In the beginning, when Rushella was drenched by rainwater, Hisui had extended a helping hand and taken her in to live in his home... But truly, the one who was saved was actually himself.

"This girl made a ton of trouble, giving me such a hard time. But with my life revolved around her all the time, I didn't have any time to think about unnecessary things. The busy days helped me to get my act together again."

Hisui narrowed his eyes as he finished.

"So what?"--If Miraluka answered like that, Hisui would have nothing to say in return.

After all, Miraluka was already back.

However, Hisui still felt compelled to continue talking.

"So, could you not touch what's precious to me, okay?"

These words stung himself as well.

To be honest, he was afraid to look at Miraluka.

But he still gathered his courage and looked up to face her.

Miraluka was still expressionless.

Without saying a word, she stood there silently.

Her complexion was so pale as always, almost transparent. Even at this moment, there was no shade of red--No emotional turmoil.

She simply took a step forward.

Everyone felt nervous.

Just as a new round of conflict was about to break out, a certain person interrupted, failing to read the mood.

"Okay, that's enough. Should I call the police? Oh right, I am the police."

Rangetsu appeared and flashed her police notebook proudly.

Despite her casual tone, her expression was very grim.

Holding a cellphone in her other hand, she was ready to all for reinforcements any time.

"The mystic eyes' effects will be over soon and people will be here shortly. Let's add a few more police to that. So, what are you going to do?"

This was not bluffing, but the situation was not improving enough to call it a reversal.

Faced against a True Ancestor-class vampire, the Supernatural Investigations Section's notebook was not going to have an effect.

Although Eruru got her revenge, Miraluka was still standing there without any problems.

This was reality.

Amidst the complicate battle of psychology, Miraluka smiled and said:

"Looks like you're greatly loved by the non-humans, although my wish is for you to avoid contact with these monsters as much as possible."

"Who do you think raised me? This is 90% your fault, you know?"

"Perhaps..."

Then she pointed at the left side of Rushella's chest.

"I shall spare your life for now."

Then she turned around and left.

No one chased after her.

Because even if they did, they could not win.

Only Rushella screamed as hard as she could:

"...Why must you take my life?"

"..."

"Who exactly am I!?"

Rushella screamed her lungs out but Miraluka did not answer. Without looking back, she issued a declaration of war.

"I definitely won't let you off next time."

Her stern voice sounded pleasing to the ear, its tone filled with the solemn dignity of an ancient vampire.

At the same time, there was undeniable seductive charm to it.

Until the image of her back disappeared into the busy streets, no one said anything.

"...Hurry and drink."

"Not drinking."

This exchange had already repated dozens of times.

Hisui already expected this answer but he still had to say it.

"Hurry and drink my blood! You're so weak now, you haven't drank blood for a long time, right!?"

"Not~ drinking!!"

Rushella struggled, refusing him.

Watching from the side, Eruru and the rest of the girls were either sighing or making wry looks.

After Miraluka left, Hisui's group had gone to Eruru's home. Kirika also met up with them and found out what happened.

Rangetsu had work and returned to the Supernatural Investigations Section first. Apart from Touko, the entire Supernatural Investigations Club were finally gathered together.

Once everyone settled down, Hisui urged Rushella to hurry and drink his blood. But she acted stubborn and refused no matter what.

"What the heck's with you? You used to drink while pinning me down under you no matter how much I struggled!?"

"Shut up, I'm on 'diet' right now."

"What dieting? It's not like you got fat, your figure still looks..."

Saying that, Hisui checked out Rushella's body, earning himself a punch from her.

"What are you doing!?"

"Stop looking at me with indecent eyes! Oh right, inside the church, you saw my n-naked body..."

"Oh yeah, that did happen. Yes, nothing's changed at all, there's no need to go on a diet."

"Stop recalling!"

Then Rushella straddled him and hammered her fists.

Her attack was like it was trying to drive the embarrassing memories out of Hisui's mind, raining punches nonstop. Hisui could not resist at all.

Kirika could not bear watching on the sidelines and ran over to pull Rushlla away. Mei also interrupted impatiently.

"What are you doing here, flirting with each other? Do it somewhere else."

"...It really hurts, okay? Thank you, Senpai."

"Let go, I'm not done with him yet!"

"Come on, show some restraint. Besides... Why aren't you drinking blood?"

This was everyone's shared question that Kirika was raising on their behalf.

Hearing that, Rushella pouted and acted awkward.

"Because... it doesn't look like it feels good, right?"

"Why are you trying to act coy at this point? It hurts, it's scary and there's the smell of blood. None of it is good."

As soon as Hisui finished, Mei and Kirika poked him.

"...What?"

"This time, you're in the wrong, Hi-kun."

"This time, it's your fault, Kujou-kun."

Both girls responded at the same time.

But Hisui was totally clueless.

"I watched a video in a net cafe... A vampire movie..."

"A vampire watching a vampire movie? Come on, those are all fake, 'kay?"

"But... It's not like they're totally wrong... Right? People who get bitten by vampires, it looks like it hurts a lot, those painful expressions on their faces, finally losing their humanity... Vampires are also so ugly... Like monsters..."

Rushella sat there uncomfortably, stammering.

Actually everything she said was true. She had finally gained some objective insight to herself, apparently.

She must have thought over many things in her days away from Hisui.

"Well... They're vampires after all, right? That's the way it is, right? When humans are hungry, don't they look like ravenous demons while they eat?"

His skills in following up on the conversation were terrible. Mei and Kirika poked him again.

"What the heck!? Did I say something wrong!?"

"I can't believe I'm sympathizing with this child. Hi-kun is so bad at delicacy."

"Shouldn't you be reflecting on why she left in the first place?"

"...Yeah."

Attacked by two heroines, Hisui could only surrender.

But he still could not figure out Rushella's thoughts.

"Aren't you the same!? You used to be so reluctant, but what happened now? After getting sucked for so long, has your 'fetish' finally awakened!?"

"No, not at all. To be honest, it hurts like hell. Your blood drinking technique sucks so badly, you haven't improved even a tiny bit all this time. It's such a pain."

"Shut up!!"

This time, Rushella's full-powered right straight struck Hisui, knocking him out.

Glaring unhappily at the unconscious Hisui, she sat down on the floor with knees drawn to her chest.

Mei and Kirika hastily discussed how to handle things. Observing silently all this time, Eruru finally spoke up.

"Looks like you finally understand that you are a contemptible monster that preys on human blood. Since you have become self-aware, it can be considered a good thing, but nothing has changed fundamentally."

Hearing her speak so bluntly, Mei and Kirika frantically warned with their eyes but Eruru ignored them. She continued:

"According to what that Pure of the Pure said, vampires originated from the act of blood drinking. This behavior probably cannot be changed. Since I, too, have inherited that contemptible blood of monsters, I have no right to look down on you... Since this is all inborn, you do not have to blame yourself totally."

"...But."

"At least, if you really were a contemptible monster, I believe that Kujou-san would not let you drink his blood. Oh well, I suppose it is possible that he is charmed by your appearance."

Eruru's words were merciless.

Most people probably could not tell if she was trying to comfort or denigrate her.

"You also saw how that Pure of the Pure ended up, right? If you do not drink blood and end up like him, then that would be really making trouble for us. I don't suppose you want to lose rationality, right?"

"..."

Deep nervousness appeared on Rushella's face.

She recalled the death of the beast that had lost its sanity.

The thought alone was enough to make her shiver in terror.

She did not want to turn into that.

She did not want to end up in that pitiful state.

She wanted to maintain her sense of self.

However, in order to retain her sense of self, to retain a vampire's rational mind... Drinking blood was necessary.

"No way... Are you starting to want to become human?"

Eruru pointed out coldly.

Rushella did not answer.

No matter how trivial the situation, she used to bring up her title of True Ancestor all the time, taking pride in it and viewing humans as ants.

In the past, she would definitely have denied Eruru's observation.

But now, she did not say anything.

Neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

"If I were human, Hisui wouldn't have such a rough time... This has crossed my mind."

"Of course. Although Kujou-san is a weird case, he is human after all. Hence, the act of blood drinking is definitely accompanied by risk to some extent. Death from blood loss, damage to blood vessels or turning vampire like during the sports festival. All of that are implied when a vampire stays close to a human."

Eruru's words seem to be reminding herself as well.

After all, she had inherited the blood of vampires too.

Saying all this to Rushella also applied partially to herself, apart from the vampirization portion.

"...I know, that's why..."

"That's why you chose to leave. But that does not mean that trouble leaves with you. Suppose both sides of the decision cause trouble no matter what, why don't you follow Kujou-san's wishes?"

"..."

"If you are not willing to drink Kujou-san's blood, there are transfusion blood packs in the fridge, you know? The taste is probably worse than muddy water for you, but a slight drink should get you through the current crisis."

"Not needed..."

Rushella shook her head.

Eruru narrowed her eyes with displeasure. Kirika and Mei also motioned with their chins to tell her to get a blood pack from the kitchen.

But Rushella did not move.

She was not simply making a show of her tsundere willfulness. Instead, it was self-awareness about her body's condition.

"I'm not lying when I say I'm not thirsty, but... It does surprise me too that I haven't reached that extent yet. I used to drink blood every single day, but now, it's unbelievable that I'm currently fine..."

"Considering this blank period, it could be considered a safe zone for now, but no one can tell how long it will last. To prevent the worst case scenario from happening, please manage your bodily condition properly."

"...I know. By the way, you've changed."

"Huh?"

Eruru made a face of puzzlement but her eyes betrayed her. Even Mei and Kirika stared at her suggestively.

"W-What?"

"Nothing much, I'm starting to think you're an obstacle along my path to have a child with Hi-kun."

"Considering it's Kujou-kun, a dhampir is fine too, how troublesome..."

The two girls nodded with understanding.

"What do you two mean by that? That look on your faces is so annoying! Spit it out clearly if you have something to say!"

"Nope, I've got nothing to say. Right, Senpai?"

"What is there to say by this point? Okay... What are we doing next?"

Hearing Kirika's question, Eruru recovered her usual state and expressed her opinion.

"Why does True Ancestor Miraluka want to take Rushella's life? Although it is just a conflict between vampires, considering that innocents might get caught up, it cannot be ignored. I believe the most important thing right now is to send her to a safe place for quarantine for now."

"If anything happened to either of those two, Hi-kun will be sad. You forgot to mention this."

"You shut up. Rushella-san, will you listen to our arrangements?"

Eruru ignored the mischievous Mei and turned to Rushella."

"...I know. I don't want to cause Hisui trouble."

To think she accepted so simply, how unlike her style in the past.

But the girls seemed to have forgotten a boy.

After Rushella and the girls left, Hisui was still lying knock out on the wooden floor.

At last, someone kicked him in the side of the head. A wave of pain finally woke Hisui up.

"Hey, what are you doing? My head is not a football!"

"Shut up, watch your tone of voice when you are a guest at my house."

Eruru was drying her hair with a towel as she looked down at him.

Seeing her just out of a bath, Hisui realized he had fainted for quite a long time.

Crawling to his feet, he looked around. Only Eruru and himself were here.

"Where's Rushella?"

"Already taken to a safe place for quarantine. It is better not to say where, just in case."

"If you say so... Okay, I admit you're right."

"So why does your foster mother see her as an enemy? Just because you two were flirting openly? Surely that cannot be everything."

"Don't be so harsh. I-I don't know either. I can't figure out the reason. If anything... Umm, Mei should be her primary target instead. Especially if Miraluka encountered one of those times when Mei pushes me down... After all, it happens all the time."

"I agree. Myself excluded. If it is for this reason, then all the girls around you will be targeted... Perhaps she has already made a move on a number of people."

Hisui wanted to avoid confronting the topic but Eruru brought it up openly.

Precisely because of that, Hisui faced her sincerely with objective analysis.

"I'm still not sure of the reason, but..."

"But?"

"I think she's getting a bit impatient. If not for that, when Rushella was together with me... She wouldn't have made a move."

"You mean she would avoid fighting Rushella for your sake? My, you do trust her so much."

Although Eruru was highly sarcastic, there was sadness in her words.

Or perhaps jealousy.

"What... should I do?"

"Why ask me? Think over it yourself. In any case, you may sleep here tonight. You cannot go home after all, right? Even if your foster mother is not home."

Hisui nodded.

He had a feeling that Miraluka would definitely be at home if he returned like this. Also, she would open the door in her usual attitude, even dragging him off to bed...

Hence, Hisui was afraid.

He dared not return.

"If the living room sofa works, just bear with it. But if you dare enter my room, even just a millimeter, I will blow your brains out."

"Like hell I'd go in there! Then just let me stay for one night. Since I'm already imposing on you, you don't mind if I ask for one more favor, do you?"

"What is it?"

"I want a medical check."

Hisui's face was serious.

Eruru was very surprised.

"Why?"

Pointing at himself, Hisui said:

"I want a proper check up from the ground up. About my constitution."

Chapter 6 - Blood's Truth

"This is a safe place, right?"

Seeing her environment, Rushella laughed in self-mockery.

Indeed, it was safe, very safe.

This kind of place, not even sunlight could enter. It was also protected heavily by alloyed armor.

Alarms will be triggered in the event of an invasion. The security guards were also experienced experts in dealing with the supernatural. Naturally, that included vampires.

Indeed, this was underground of the MPD at Kasumigaseki--The Supernatural Investigations Section headquarters.

Futhermore, Rushella was currently at the deepest part of the headquarters, the prison where Fergus used to be incarcerated.

Although she was not handcuffed and she had come here voluntarily, it still felt no different from being an inmate.

"Don't complain. Your coffin has been transported here from that church so get some proper rest."

Standing behind her, Rangetsu said reluctantly.

Last night, she had gone to pick up Rushella.

In any case, Rushella was first brought to the relevant part of the MPD to undergo questioning like "have you drunk human blood during the time you were missing" as a matter of formality.

Then under Rangetsu's supervision, she was treated to a meal and a bath--At least she was treated with courtesy.

In the end, after all sorts of procedures and the underground facility was prepared properly, the day had gone by and it was daytime during the following day.

"This place is so dark, there's no concept of time. What time is it now?"

"What are you complaining about dark as a vampire? Okay, just keep still and don't make a fuss. If you don't behave, you'll have to stay here forever, you know?"

"Hmph, this place has been broken into before, is it really safe? I can see repairs in process all over the place."

"Now that is a hard one to refute... However, this is at least the safest place in Japan. Just stay here obediently, for Kujou-kun's sake as well."

"I know."

"We can still provide blood. Tell us immediately if you feel thirsty."

Saying that, Rangetsu left. Rushella did not respond to this final word of advice.

Naturally, she could not forget the taste of blood.

Hisui's sweet, very sweet blood.

With just one sip, whether the dryness in her throat or the thirst in her heart, everything was satisfied.

However, she had refused resolutely.

With a grim face, Rushella was crouching in a corner of the square cell.

There was no lighting in the room. Total darkness.

A human would surely be plunged into fear of the dark and try desperately to escape. But Rushella felt calm instead.

No, the place where her heart felt truly calm and at ease was the home where she had lived together with Hisui.

However, that place was no longer her home.

It was not where she belonged to in the first place, just temporary shelter.

Perhaps... Staying here would be more comfortable.

Wiping the tears from the corner of her eye, Rushella looked around the room.

This place had no view and was undecorated.

Even in the darkness, Rushella's vision functioned as normal. Her eyes soon captured the entire room's environment--Then she was shocked.

"...Who is it!?"

Someone was here.

Opposite her gaze, in the other corner, someone was sitting in a chair.

"A shared room? Why wasn't I told about it?"

The other party did not answer.

The sound of a match being struck. A moment later, faint light appeared.

An old-fashioned candlestick was placed at the person's foot. The candlelight illuminated the entire room.

It was apparently a scented candle, filling the room with a sweet fragrance of imaginative fantasy.

"It's you...!"

Rushella was rendered speechless.

Impossible.

How could she possibly come here?

Rushella could not believe her own eyes--Miraluka was sitting right before her.

But it was reality.

Miraluka was sitting elegantly with legs crossed, having changed out of her inverness dress, leaning back on the chair in leisure.

"How are you here!?"

"I was here from the start."

She replied nonchalantly.

Rushella was rooted to the spot in shock while Miraluka talked nonstop.

"I guess that you might be brought here to be isolated. Running away from my grasp is impossible, but to achieve a certain measure of defense, this place is the best choice. Hence, after that brief fight, I came here first to wait for you."

Clearly it was not as simple as her coming here first.

This woman was fundamentally different from the vampires or other supernatural entities Rushella had faced off against in the past.

"This police security of the Supernatural Investigations Section is really full of holes... I can't believe they let you invade this place."

"You're blaming the wrong people if you blame them. Although they are currently shorthanded, invisibility is the expertise of vampires, let alone a True Ancestor like me. Infiltrating this place is no difficult task if I'm serious. By the way, one of the True Ancestors was even more talented at invisibility than me, but she's no longer around."

Sadness filled Miraluka's eyes when she brought up her peer's death.

But Rushella could not empathize.

She could only respond with genuine feelings.

"You came to kill me...?"

"Half correct, half wrong. I am not interested in your life or death, but it's just incidental to what will happen."

"Incomprehensible... If you find me an eyesore, say it clearly! Because... I find you very much of an eyesore too."

"Hmph, is that so?"

Miraluka nodded with deep feeling.

Seeing her so arrogant, Rushella could not help but spit out all the thoughts she had kept hidden in her heart.

"It's you every time...! When I'm together with Hisui, you always appear! If only you didn't exist... If only you didn't exist...!!"

"If I didn't exist, then Hisui would not have lived to this day."

Miraluka answered indifferently. Rushella could not talk back.

Victory was decided from the start.

Denying her meant denying Hisui.

"A young little life that almost died from inane reasons. I used to believe, for a very long time, that humans were foolish creatures. Taking in a human on a whim to raise, I never knew it would be so interesting. I now understand a little how my perished peers felt."

"You said it was on a whim...? Hisui, he... has always felt... towards you...!"

Rushella clenched her fists and glared viciously at Miraluka.

A million thoughts converged, forming invisible pressure imposed upon Miraluka.

The negative emotions in the underground prison finally turned into killing intent, coalescing in Rushella's hands.

Holding her usual dagger in a reverse grip, she closed in on the enemy.

"Is that so...? He loved me, I see."

"What...!?"

"In that case, my return was worth it. Now there is meaning for me to kill you."

"What are you talking about!?"

Rushella had already rushed up to her but Miraluka remained unfazed.

Instead, she pointed at the door.

"Would you like a change of location? This place really kills the mood."

"You mean changing to a location more suitable to killing me?"

"That I won't deny. But I could at least offer you a gift to take with you to hell, how's that? About your origins."

"...!? You know about it?"

"Merely indirect hearsay, but I have investigated your identity. Follow me if you wish to know."

Miraluka walked out the door.

After some hesitation, Rushella followed.

Even though this was path to hell, her intense desire to figure out her past still prevailed over all else.

This time, the prison break was calm and elegant, unlike the two previous incidents with severe casualties.

Zero casualties, no loss or damage.

The number of people who discovered the escapees were also zero.

Minutes later, when the setting sun's lingering glow was dyeing the sky, the two vampires arrived at the ground's surface in each other's company.

"Kujou-kun... Did something happen today?"

"Nothing."

After school, Hisui was packing his things when his neighbor, Reina, asked with worry..

After all, Hisui only came to school in the afternoon, so it was natural for her to worry.

No, even if that was not the case, she would still worry for Hisui.

Ever since Rushella left, that was how she had been acting.

"I didn't feel well earlier and visited the hospital. The doctor said I'm just tired so there's nothing major."

This did not count as a lie.

He had gone to the hospital and there was nothing unusual with his health.

"Really...? I'm glad to hear that."

"Oh right, I forgot to tell you. Rushella came back."

"Eh, really?"

Reina instantly smiled radiantly.

Hisui also found her smile contagious.

"Should we celebrate? After all, it's almost Christmas!"

"Christmas huh..."

Only after saying that word did Hisui realize how incompatible it was with vampires. He could not help but smile wryly.

In terms of average Japanese people's faith, there should not be any detrimental effect on Rushella. But considering Reina's family situation, she might even invite them to attend mass at a church.

Spending Christmas at a church was probably hell for a vampire... No, calling it heaven might be more apt?

"It's okay, you don't have to. If we organize some kind of event, she might regret coming back."

"Okay, I guess you have a point... Christmas should be spent with family after all. Are you going to spend it with that lady who visited last time?"

These words caused Hisui's chest to tighten.

Indeed, he had spent Christmas every year with her in the past.

Hisui already knew a long time ago that Santa Claus did not exist, but there was Miraluka.

Every year, he would receive a present, eat turkey and cake.

A Christmas spent with a vampire--This kind of exotic event had stopped since last year.

The winter of his third year in middle school, he had spent a lonely Christmas, a silent night without Miraluka.

So, what about this year?

"Who are you going to spend Christmas with?"

Reina asked again without any ill intent.

I'm fine with spending it alone if there's no one--Perhaps Hisui could say that.

"...I dunno."

But he evaded the question and chose escapism.

Reina wanted to say more but Hisui left her behind and got out of the classroom.

Mei watched him leave.

Then as though thinking of something, she walked over to Eruru who was packing her schoolbag.

"Umm... Could you stay a while? I'm guessing Senpai has things to ask you."

"Got it. Then the usual place...? Never mind, how about the student council office?"

"No problem. Let's go."

It was currently dusk.

The red evening glow covered the entire sky. Shortly after, it was going to be devoured by the dark canopy of night.

Who knew how much time had passed. Miraluka and Rushella had arrived at the park near Hisui's house.

There were few pedestrians here. Plus the thick foliage blocked the street lights, this place was particularly dark even in the daytime, let alone night.

"I used to take Hisui here often. There are no kids in the area and other parks are packed with people, so I could only bring him here. What a shame that we couldn't experience what people call family outings."

"Hmph, showing off much? Let me tell you, I have memories too, right here in this park! After all, over there is the place Hisui and I met!"

Rushella puffed out her chest proudly and pointed at the alley where she had met Hisui for the first time.

Indeed, that night, she had encountered Hisui here--then sucked his blood.

Everything started here.

"Oh my, how unfortunate for that brat."

Hisui would probably agree if he heard that.

Miraluka walked over to the pavilion in the center of the park. Rushella followed with a scowl.

The two of them sat down on the wooden bench and looked at each other.

Miraluka took out two wine glasses and placed them on a small table. She had picked them up from home on the way. Then she took out a bottle of vintage fine wine and poured into the glasses.

"I don't drink."

"I didn't poison it. Poisoning would be meaningless for both of us. Don't you like this color and fragrance? We cannot resist. This is a taste shared by all vampires."

"...Hisui will get mad. He sad that minors cannot drink this. He is clearly a minor himself."

"Oh really? By the way, in my collection is a bottle of wine whose vintage is the year Hisui was born. Do you know where it went?"

"...No idea."

She did not admit she was the one who broke it.

This incident still pained Rushella in her heart.

She really hated this woman.

"Okay... About me, if you know something then answer me quickly! I don't have the mood to drink and chat with you!"

Rushella asked fiercely while Miraluka picked up a glass of wine elegantly.

Savoring the fragrant and complicated wine, she looked at Rushella.

"There are a total of twelve True Ancestors and you are not one of them."

"So what? Then who am I!?"

"Twelve women... Some of them have barely spoken to me while others have never liked me. But we would all gather once a year to meet up. A kind of year end report, I suppose. Drinking red wine, eating bread, chatting casually. It was very lively."

"A 'reunion' for True Ancestors huh? That's so human of you and them. When did you gather every year?"

"Christmas."

Miraluka answered with full seriousness but Rushella could not help but suspect her of joking.

Impossible.

This was absolutely absolutely absolutely impossible.

"Are you really a vampire!?"

"What's wrong with celebrating his birthday? Everything of ours started with him, from the very day when we embraced his remains and drank his blood."

Rushella hid her laughter after hearing that. She gradually understood that what was up next was related to her true identity.

"We would gather every year, but starting at some point, someone became absent. Although those of us attending did not decrease every year, it was at least decreasing every century. Some were destroyed by humans, other sought destruction on their own, others had accidents. By the time we were down to half, someone spoke up. She said that things would be bad at this rate and vampires will go extinct one day, so something must be done."

"Why did they think that? As long as we want, we can create servants easily..."

"When a True Ancestor perishes, so does all her servants."

"Then have offspring and descendants..."

"A vampire's reproductive ability is much lower than a human's. Even with an immortal body, one cannot bear too many children in the end. And among them are some who are like me, childless our entire lives with no intention of procreating. Then what? To sustain the prosperity of the race, ultimately, the base number of True Ancestors needs to be expanded."

"Expanded...!? Is that possible?

Rushella smacked the table and stood up.

As planned by that Fergus, as long as the direct bloodline of a True Ancestor was maintained, the existence of pureblooded vampires infinitely close to True Ancestors could be maintained.

But how could a True Ancestor herself be recreated?

Staring into the wine in her glass, Miraluka continued nonstop. Recalling back then, this was the liquid that man had called "my blood."

"The blood of God that we drank no longer exists. According to legend, there are a few holy relics that were stained with that blood, but the veracity is difficult to determine for all of them. Even if they were real, freshness has been lost. So another method must be found in search of substitutes."

"Substitutes...?"

This word made Rushella go pale.

She could already guess.

But she dared not speak out.

"Indeed. The closest substitute to God... That is rather taboo to say. Rather, the substitute with the most concentrated curse in the blood, punished by God, namely, the blood of the True Ancestors."

"...!"

"Giving a vampire's blood to another vampire has no effect. But giving it to a human is different. Whether ingested orally or injected directly into a blood vessel, it always result in irregular vampirization, giving birth to a vicious monster. The same goes for a True Ancestor's blood, of course. However, there were exceptions among them."

"Exceptions...?"

Rushella's face turned more and more pale.

Stop talking.

Don't say anymore.

A voice was screaming that in her mind.

"I don't know the precise details either. They asked me, so I provided my blood but I was not interested in how it was going to be used. Neither did I know who it was used on. However, at the very least, you were born.

I have heard of rare cases of success. Fakes who had drunk the blood of True Ancestors. Former humans. During childhood or puberty, perhaps even in the womb--A certain True Ancestor conferred her blood to you. This resulted in turning you into a vampire infinitely close to a True Ancestor. If you're asking what is your identity, you are one of our subspecies, what one might call a Pseudo True Ancestor, perhaps?"

"Pseudo True Ancestor..."

Rushella understood this term.

In other words, a so-called imposter.

An artificial creation created by the True Ancestors' need.

She was a fake existence from the start.

Rushella slid down from the bench and fell on the ground.

Shaken regarding her own origin, she was unable to support her body.

"Who... am I...?"

Looking at Miraluka, she searched for answers.

But Miraluka did not care about her at all, all she saw was wine.

"How would I know? Perhaps an ordinary character you could find anywhere, but I suspect you have undergone modification. You have no memories probably because you never experienced life in human society to begin with. Just find a suitable garden, implant a bit of basic knowledge, then you were born. Since you woke up as though you had hibernated, your actual age is probably similar to your appearance. But your heart is like a newborn baby's, a pure and untainted True Ancestor. The reason you love Hisui is merely an imprinting process similar to a hatchling's. That being said, his special constitution, allowing you to drink from him as you wish in a semi-perpetual manner, is probably one of the reasons."

Rushella remained collapsed, sitting on the ground.

Everything was futile.

The past she hoped to find did not exist in the first palce.

She regretted searching for her roots.

Her only measure of identity--a True Ancestor vampire--also collapsed totally.

"They placed you in a coffin after birth, preserved appropriately then kept securely in different locations--That's all I heard. I never expected to find one of them sleeping in my surroundings."

"Why put me on that kind of mountain...? The True Ancestors created me then abandoned me...?"

"You'll have to ask the True Ancestor who created you. That said, she no longer exists. She created you and others just in case, but she perished first. On the other hand, someone like me who cared nothing for the proliferation of the race ended up surviving. What a twist of fate."

Miraluka downed her glass of wine, stood up and walked over to Rushella.

Supporting herself with her arms, Rushella kept backing away.

"...I understand about me now. But why do you have to kill me... Is it just because the sight of me offends you...? In your eyes, I am an imposter, so you cannot bear the sight...!?"

"No, I feel grateful to you instead. Your existence is truly excellent insurance."

The sun was about to set.

The crimson gaze pierced Rushella.

Normally speaking, the mystic eyes had no effect on vampires themselves.

But the light from Miraluka's eyes was immeasurably commanding. Rushella could not help but sprawl on the ground.

"What is your goal...!?"

Miraluka smiled mercilessly and pointed at the left of Rushella's chest.

That was where she had targeted yesterday.

This was her ultimate goal all along.

"I want your heart."

"Is there anything you've figured out? Not just Hi-kun, even Eruru-chan is making such a solemn look?"

The group was gathered around the long table in the student council office. Mei was the first to speak.

Right now, the only people present were her and Eruru, as well as Kirika who had provided the student council office.

The president and the other student council members were not around, making this the perfect spot for a confidential conversation.

"Kujou-san had a thorough checkup this morning."

"Oh my, you two have progressed to that point already? Should I cook red beans and rice to celebrate?"

"...Sudou-san."

Kirika scolded Mei for her messing around and urged Eruru to continue with her gaze.

"The object of the tests was about Kujou-san's constitution."

"Oh you've checked it before, right? But nothing came out in the end, didn't it?"

"Indeed. No particular conclusion was reached this time either. However, more time was spent on the physiological analysis, hence some of that Miraluka vampire's intent could be deduced as a result."

"What's going on? Why does she want to kill Rushella?"

Eruru did not answer Kirika. Instead, she asked her and Mei another question.

"Let me ask you two. How would you destroy a vampire?"

Why ask this now? Mei and Kirika exchanged glances in puzzlement.

"Hmm, expose them to sunlight... Stake them through the heart?"

"Decapitation then crush the head... Although it's so bloody that I don't really want to actually do it."

Eruru nodded quietly, seemingly satisfied with these cliched answers.

"Correct indeed. Conversely, attacks to the head and heart will cause fatal injuries to vampires. These locations cannot regenerate."

"I know that kind of stuff but what does it have to do with the current incident?"

"Are you implying that Miraluka is actually a fake... The real one is already dead?"

Eruru shook her head and refuted Kirika's question.

"No, she is most likely the real one, which is why Kujou-san feels so troubled. Just as he told us, Miraluka possesses the greatest powers of regeneration among all vampires. Surviving on willpower alone was most likely true. But she is currently very weak. She has no more time."

"Incomplete regeneration? I don't think I saw her in pain or discomfort?"

Mei tried hard to recall what had happened but could not identify anything unusual.

Since she had lost that badly in a contest of strength, she ought to conclude that Miraluka was very strong, not weak.

"She is flawed but not in pain. That is why our attacks failed. I found it strange at the time and Kujou-san probably noticed it. He probably did not tell us because he refused to admit it. This time, the wool was pulled over his eyes as well."

"What do you mean? She looks very normal in appearance, right? What is she lacking?"

Seeing Kirika baffled, Eruru pointed at the left of her own chest.

"She is lacking a heart."

" "HUH!?" "

Mei and Kirika were stunned speechless while Eruru continued:

"Yesterday, my silver bullet shot through her heart. The bullet definitely pierced the chest. Supposing the bullet was blocked by a rib, or stayed in the heart, she should have suffered severe injury, but she still managed to live. But the bullet definitely pierced her body with the same effect as a wooden stake piercing the heart, yet she did not perish. Why?"

Incomprehensible.

How would one know?

Mei and Kirika could only shake their heads with pale faces.

"The answer is simple. She has no heart to begin with. Since it is not there, it cannot be destroyed. Hence the bullet shot through easily because there was no obstacle, because there was no heart there at all."

"Umm... Hold on, hold on right there, how does she live without a heart!?"

"Was her heart damaged and did not regenerate for some reason!? But if that's the case, she should be destroyed, right?"

Neither of them could accept it. Eruru indifferently explained the results of Hisui's tests.

"Her heart still exists. Even right now, it is currently beating. However, it is outside her body."

Mei and Kirika looked at each other.

Judging from the earlier conversation, the answer was right in front of them.

"Could it be... her heart..."

"Inside Kujou-kun's body..."

"Indeed. Her heart has been transplanted into Kujou-san. Kujou-san suffered a heavy injury overseas with severe damage to his heart. There was no other way to save him. The operation was probably performed without even using anesthetics but at the time, Kujou-san was in no condition to care what exactly she was doing to him. However, he seems to remember hazily. The scar left on his chest, the special constitution rendering vampirization ineffective, as well as his memories of her performing chest compressions desperately. Judging from the surgical scars and the ECG, he definitely went through an operation. Unlike dhampirs like me, he is a human with vampire powers residing in his body."

This explanation brought upon a long silence.

Miraluka barely managed to survive with her heart beating outside her body.

This miraculous sustenance of life was only made possible by an immortal vampire.

However, this could not possibly be sustained indefinitely.

"Right now, her body is an empty shell without a core. Precisely because she is a True Ancestor, she is barely hanging on to life. Even with her heart outside her body, as long as the heart remains fine, she remains immortal--That is precisely a vampire."

"How long can she last like this?"

Mei asked seriously.

Whether or not her heart was inside her body, it was fine as long as she lived.

At least Hisui would be satisfied.

But if her resurrection was only temporary, if she was no longer eternal... She must definitely be planning something as a result.

"Since her heart is absent from her body, she might perish any time. At least, she is currently so weak that she cannot even heal the injury from blocking a bullet with her hand. She probably cannot last much longer. The reason she gathered huge quantities of blood was most likely to find a solution. But she discovered that it was futile whether she sought quality or quantity. Hence, she now regards Rushella as her last resort for salvation."

"Using her... as a backup heart?"

Kirika concluded.

Her original heart was sustaining Hisui's life and could not be taken out, of course.

Hence, she could only search for a substitute.

Using a vampire's regenerative abilities, transplanting another person's organs or limbs were not a problem at all.

"Indeed. But this is a heart after all, so it cannot be replaced so easily. A human heart is definitely not going to work while ordinary vampires will not necessarily satisfy her. Hence, she chose the heart closest to her own, one closest to a True Ancestor's heart. The answer is... Rushella."

Eruru concluded.

After a moment's silence, Mei said:

"Will this... succeed? It's a heart after all? If taking it out and installing it would work, she wouldn't have to go through so much trouble."

Kirika also agreed. This action could lead to futility.

"Even if the transplant succeeds, there is no guarantee how long she will live. Then wouldn't Rushella-san have died for nothing? If her heart is taken out of her body, Rushella-san would surely perish instantly."

"Indeed, perhaps you two are right. Miraluka surviving is a miracle. Kujou-san sustaining the heart is also a miracle. The two of them meeting again is yet another miracle. However, she is still gambling everything on this. Most likely, she must have tried all sorts of solutions after returning but none worked. Still, she clings to life, refusing to give up."

"It must be for Hi-kun."

"Women are the weaker sex, yet they are powerful as mothers... No, rather, it is a woman's dedication."

The girls smiled wryly.

We really can't win against her--Their smiles carried such a realization.

The True Ancestor who had chosen destruction for the sake of a boy. Now, she was seeking life for the same boy.

The trio fell silent. Eruru looked at her cellphone.

A text from Rangetsu.

"She says Rushella-san has gone missing. Presumably, she would not leave on her own... Miraluka probably visited."

"Oh my, what a pain! Vampires really can't give us a break!"

"No helping it... She is doing it for Kujou-kun after all."

Mei and Kirika stood up and left the student council office.

Eruru was about to follow them when they asked her at the same time.

"You're not going to tell Hi-kun?"

"Keeping him out... Isn't that not good?"

Eruru was struggling internally too.

Not wanting to get him involved, these was Eruru's benevolent intent--As long as the few of them could handle this matter, it would be for the best.

However, Eruru chose something else.

"Please go ahead first, you two. Oogami-san already memorized her smell so it should be easy to track her. You two meet up with Oogami-san first."

"Okay, I'm leaving Hi-kun to you❤"

"We will be waiting for you."

Eruru saw them off then ran through the corridor to that empty classroom.

"Hisui-kun, you look like it's the end of the world."

Hisui was sprawled over a desk. Touko was hovering leisurely by his side.

She was actually quite annoying but today, Hisui found her presence calming.

Seeing things getting complicated, perhaps she was the only one who could remain uninvolved.

"Touko-san, you're in such good spirits even though you're dead."

After saying that, he realized he was being way too sarcastic.

But Touko did not mind. Raising her arms, she curled her forearms and made an energetic pose.

"Yes❤ You've gotta enjoy life to the max!"

"Well, your life has already ended, Touko-san..."

"Of course not. Earth-bound spirits still need love!"

"You'd better pray for love in your next life. By the way, don't you want to move on to the afterlife?"

"Feelings are very important for things like that. When the time comes, I might disappear without even the chance to finish saying 'I am so happy...'"

Touko laughed sadly.

On further thought, Hisui realized her presence was the weakest. After all, the vast majority of people could not sense her existence.

By the time people were able to see her, they were perhaps already dead.

"...Touko-san, what about your family? Whether or not you want to move on, since you never got the chance to say goodbye to them, how about find them... and meet them or something?"

"Hmm, my family situation wasn't too good. I think they've moved away already so I don't have to visit on purpose. Getting too attached to things from my life won't help. I have to live by looking to the future!"

"Yeah, well, you're already dead..."

It was no joking matter for a dead person to be advising a living person on how to live.

"By the way... What's troubling you, Hisui-kun? Is it that pretty lady?"

"Yeah, pretty much. She's currently alive probably because of me. It feels like she crawled out of the grave because she was too worried about me. Clearly it's something to be happy about but I can't feel happy, so lame of me. I don't wish for her to be better off dead, but..."

"But?"

--Could he stand aside and ignore Rushella's death?

Indeed, he had been asking himself.

He ought to talk to her and ask if there existed some other solution.

However, Miraluka must have thought over this type of question already.

Before revealing herself, she must have tried many solutions.

However, finding nothing, her limit was approaching.

Hence--

"Actually, don't make things out to be too complicated, okay?"

Touko the optimist spoke while going in a circle in the air.

Seeing her so optimistic, Hisui could not help but retort harshly.

"What do you mean? I'm facing a war between the mother-in-law and the bride. How do you expect me to get out of this kind of hopeless situation?"

"Hmm, choosing between the two of them, who is the most important, but do you really need to agonize over this kind of thing?"

Touko was still drifting back and forth on the side.

Looking detached from the mundane world, she was simply speaking as an observer and elder.

"Because you're all alive. Unlike me, you're all living. Important people, important things, these will all increase as time goes by. If you have to rank everything and pick out what's the most important, doesn't that mean giving up on so many things?"

"..."

"Isn't it better to live life more greedily, embracing everyone in your bosom?"

Touko smiled tenderly.

Hisui could not help but smile too.

Oh I see now.

Actually, he already knew a long time ago.

"Elders are different after all."

"Despite how I look, I am like an older sister! Do you know why I am so great?"

"Now I know. But don't move on until I leave this school, okay?"

"Yes, I will stay here for ten more years!"

That's way too long--Hisui could not help but remark in his heart.

Then he left the empty classroom and ended up running into Eruru in the hallway.

"Kariya..."

"Rushella-san has gone missing. She is most likely with your foster mother. Are you coming?"

"Yeah."

"Perhaps one of them might end up dead. Rather, I might be firing my gun."

"No problem. I will try my best to stop them."

"What a fool. Why don't you stop interfering in conflicts between vampires?"

"Don't say that. If you get into a fight with someone, I will try to stop it too."

"..."

Eruru went silent.

Gazing at Hisui, her expression was inscrutable.

"...What? Shouldn't we hurry?"

Hisui urged.

Hence, Eruru finally resolved herself to speak.

"I have something I wanted to say to you. Starting a long time ago, I have wanted to tell you this."

"What?"

"I... I..."

Taking a deep breath, she stared into Hisui's eyes and said, one word at a time:

"I ABSOLUTELY HATE YOU!!"

"Huh?"

Hisui was baffled.

He completely failed to understand.

"Uh, I never got the feeling you liked me... But I never expected to hear something so harsh from you directly."

"I have always wanted to tell you those words."

"Hmm, fine, can't be helped... On the other hand, I like you quite a lot."

Instantly, Eruru's entire face went bright red.

Hisui did not notice and continued.

"You're a person with a heart, you helped me so much... Anyway, thank you."

"..."

"So... Let's continue to get along."

As soon as he said that, Hisui felt himself getting kicked in the shin. That force felt like it was enough to break a wooden bat.

"Ouch, what the heck!?"

"Shut up, that is what I hate about you! How can you be considerate for others all the time, how can you be so handsome and gallant, how can you be born with such smarts, everything about you pisses me off!"

"Y-You don't have to go so far..."

Rejected by her totally, Hisui could not help feeling a little sad.

Seeing Hisui make that kind of face, Eruru seemed to get angry. As for why she was angry, Hisui totally could not understand.

"In any case, keep yourself the same, the way I hate you! Don't carelessly change yourself, that will be even more annoying! So... So.. Stay the same as always!"

"...Hmm, okay... I will."

Hisui answered and got kicked again.

Just as he was about to protest, Eruru grabbed his hand.

"Okay, hurry!"

"I know! Sigh, what pissed you off so much..."

While running through the corridor, Hisui muttered in puzzlement.

Behind them, Touko was happily watching them leave.

"My heart...?"

Rushella covered her left breast.

Indeed, that was where Miraluka aimed last time.

But why?

"Are you saying you want to destroy me completely because I am in your way..!?"

"If I wanted to destroy you, I would have done it a long time ago. I simply want your heart, that is all."

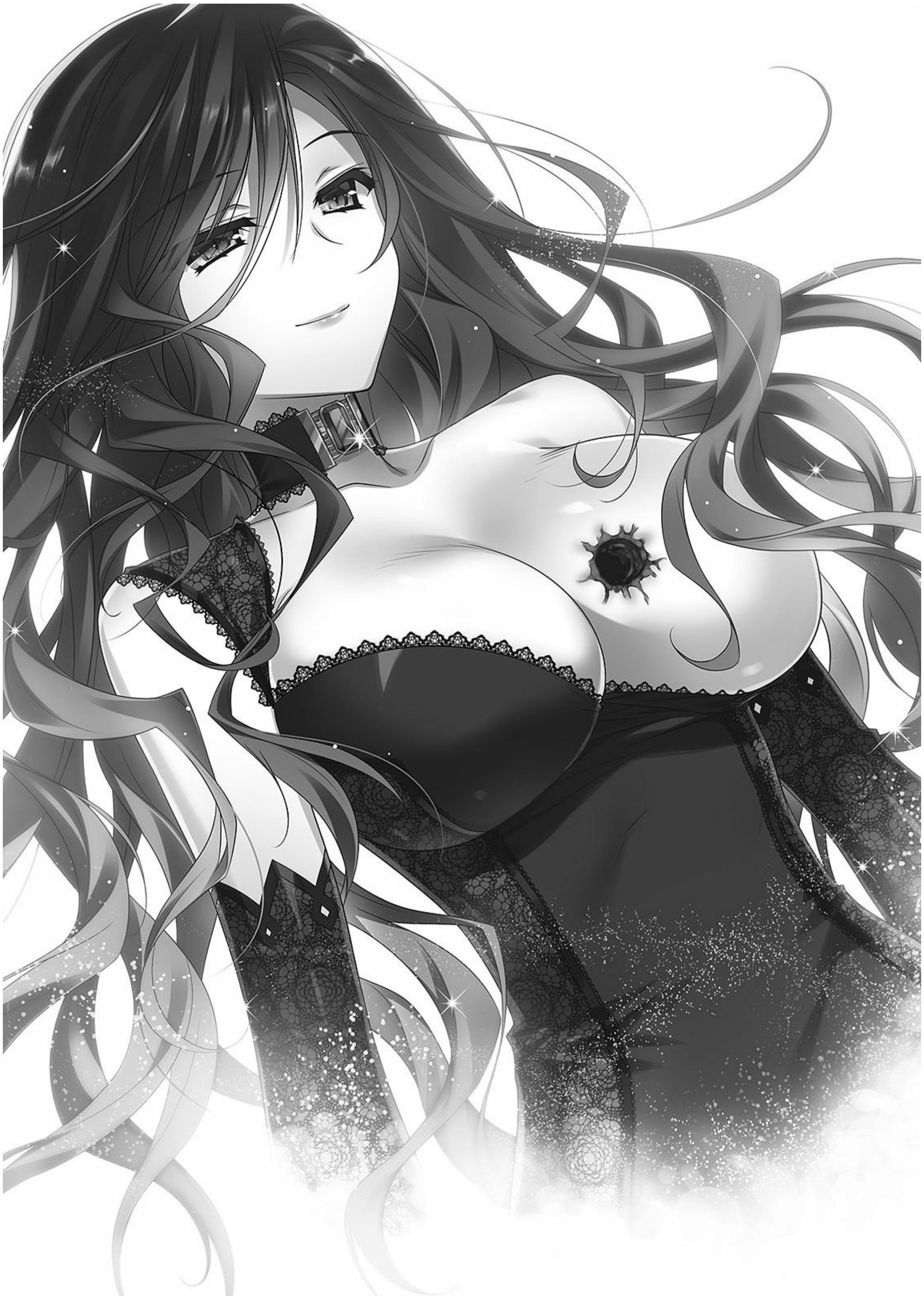
"I am asking you your goal...!"

"Have you heard of heart transplants? Because... I don't have one..."

Miraluka took off her inverness dress then unclasped a strap to reveal her left breast.

On the white and pale breast, surpassing Rushella's in volume, a clear bullet hole was visible.

It was an empty hole left on the chest after being pierced by a bullet.



"You...!"

"Who knows when this wound will heal up. But rather, whether I can survive until the day it heals is also unknown. Right now, I don't even have half the power from my prime."

"Why...? Unlike me, you are a real True Ancestor, right!?"

"Indeed, precisely because of that, I managed to survive, barely. But I already gave my heart to Hisui. I lived because my heart is still beating, but this is the limit. Like a wound clock that will stop turning eventually. So... I can only get a new replacement, a substitute infinitely close to me. Even if the result is a gamble... I can only take the gamble."

Rushella finally understood Miraluka's intent.

She wanted her body, her heart.

This body, created as a True Ancestor's backup, was now carrying out its duty, how ironic.

"You chose death once... to save Hisui. Now, you have returned for Hisui and you will live on for him. Is that what's going on?"

"...Living on is precisely my lot in life as a vampire. I will do so even at the cost of destroying you."

"Is that so...? Very well, take it. I don't care."

Like Miraluka, Rushella exposed her left breast.

After sunset, the evening wind blew across her white chest.

"May I? I am rather special, while you will immediately perish once your heart is gouged out?"

"Sure. This is the only thing I can do... for that guy."

Miraluka's face went dark.

Her beautiful face had been as serene as a lake until now. Faint signs of laughter were surfacing.

But she still stepped forward.

Reaching out, her right hand turned into a killing weapon.

Rushella closed her eyes tightly in resignation, puffing out her chest, offering everything.

At the last moment, footsteps were heard from behind.

Miraluka looked back. The arrivals were related to Hisui.

They were Mei, Kirika and Rangetsu.

"Trying to stop me?"

The trio nodded at the same time.

"Why? She is the rival of you three. And it's a conflict between vampires. Why interfere?"

"To earn affection points!"

Mei replied instantly.

"That's right, if anything happened to this child, if we watched without doing anything, he will surely hate us. I don't want that."

Kirika smiled sadly.

"Also, if you were to succeed... I will be excluded by them even more. I don't have much presence already."

Rangetsu declared with an elder's dignity.

Everyone was in agreement.

"When did he learn to capture women's hearts so well? I don't know if I should be happy or sad about that."

Miraluka sighed in exasperation and smiled.

At this time, new intruders arrived, deepening Miraluka's smile.

Hisui and Eruru arrived one after another.

Hisui was carrying the sacred cross sword from home, the Tzara Blade.

On the sword's blade, gemstones were giving off crimson light dyeing the surroundings red.

"You brought the talisman I left you? What are you intending? To destroy me with it?"

"...No."

"Fighting using your constitution? Your body carries the potential for a human to oppose vampires. If humans could stand on equal ground with vampires, then there will no longer be conflict between them. Perhaps coexistence could be actualized. Are you thinking of using this power to fight me?"

"No."

Then what are you going to do?"

Hisui pointed the Tzara Blade at himself.

"This heart, I'm returning it to you."

Closing his eyes, Hisui pierced his own chest with the blade.

Blood splashed everywhere.

Kirika screamed while Mei and Rangetsu were stunned.

Eruru had apparently predicted this scene. Turning her face away, she endured the smell of blood, desperately trying to maintain her sanity.

"What are you doing...!?"

Miraluka finally showed surprise on her face.

She had not given Hisui this sword for this kind of task.

"Are you trying to waste everything I've done!?"

"...You're the one who's wasting everything. I don't want to lose you again. Neither do I want to lose Rushella!"

Hisui pressed against his left chest that was bleeding like a spring.

The bleeding was making his originally pale skin even more pallid. The crest of thorns appeared on his neck.

Anti-Drac mode.

But this transformation was just a necessary result. It was not his goal.

"This was originally yours... I'm returning it to you now. This is enough. Don't do anything to Rushella."

"..."

"What about me? Aren't there artificial hearts? There are many solutions so I'll live, somehow... Otherwise, use your vampire powers to make me hibernate or seal me away, whatever you want. I'll wait for you, whether it takes a decade or a century, to make me live on. So stop, it's already enough..."

Hisui desperately used the sacred cross sword to support his collapsing body.

Rushella ran over to hug him.

"Hang in there, don't die!!"

"Don't write me off as dead so easily. You said it before, right...? So don't die either. Also, you too."

The last three words were directed at Miraluka.

He was not mature enough to send everyone he cherished to a perfect ending.

He was not cool enough to abandon everything for one cherished person.

So he had no choice.

And Miraluka--She smiled, smiling faintly with a satisfaction.

"Wonderful."

"Huh...?"

"Looks like you don't need me anymore. This time will be true farewell."

Everyone present tensed up.

Rather than destroying her, they only wanted to protect him.

The girls were trying to save Hisui's life.

And Hisui, to avoid losing her again...

But time was merciless.

The outline of Miraluka's face was collapsing bit by bit.

Starting from the edges, her body was gradually turning into ash.

"Why...!? Hey!"

Hisui ran over.

He wanted to hug Miraluka, but the collapsing limbs were scattered in the wind, leaving only her torso in his arms.

"Why... Why!? Why do this...!? Hey, hurry and drink blood, as much as you need, drink my blood! If you die a second time, I absolutely won't forgive you!"

"I am already dead to begin with. Also, I don't need your blood. Who do you take me for?"

"No time for jokes... Hey!"

"Your blood... Save it for her."

Miraluka's eyes met with Hisui's gaze.

Staying where she was, the last True Ancestor smiled tenderly.

Like a mother handing over her son, like sister handing over her younger brother, like a woman handing over her lover...

She said to Rushella:

"Continue to drink Hisui's blood. The true value of Anti-Drac mode is in his blood--The weakening of a vampire. His blood tastes excellent and is addictive. Then the vampire becomes progressively weak. One day, you will become completely human."

"You..."

Rushella wanted to step foward but she halted.

This final instant, this farewell moment, should be left for those two alone.

"Farewell forever."

"Hey, hold on, I still haven't--"

Before he could say anything.

Thank you, goodbye, I love you.

None of this could be said to her.

Still the same, nothing changed.

He could only watch helplessly, exactly the same as that day in the past.

Hence, he could only kiss the air. It was the only thing he could do.

Only the mark of her lips remained in the present world, not disappearing for a very long time.

But while their lips separated, the beauty in his arms had already vanished.

The exquisite remains of ash retained the smiling face of Miraluka's final moments, finally scattering in the night, disappearing into the wind.

Hisui embraced the ashes tightly in his arms, sobbing uncontrollably.

Ever since Miraluka died, this was his first time crying.

His cries echoed between heaven and earth, persisting for a long time.

Staying by Hisui's side, Rushella accompanied him. Even when the others had left, she still remained. Forever and ever...

Final Chapter - White Ending

It was snowing.

Christmas Eve was welcomed by snow, dying the streets white.

"Wow, snow is really pretty!"

Rushella was apparently seeing snow for the first time. On the way home from shopping, she exclaimed happily.

A Christmas party was to be held at Hisui's home today--All members of the Supernatural Investigations Club were planning to attend.

Going out with his friends to shop, Hisui was then going home together as a group.

All the others were immersed in the holiday atmosphere, chatting happily, but only Hisui did not seem quite happy.

Miraluka's passing was only a few days ago so he could hardly be blamed.

"What is the matter?"

Eruru asked with care.

This was her being caring. Hisui could tell from her face.

"Nothing... I was wondering whether this was her gift. A gift she deliberately sent in advance for Christmas."

"A vampire giving a Christmas gift? What a lame joke."

"In the past, I really needed her... I've always imagined, wondering if she might return one day. And that she was surely in the surroundings. So... seeing me troubled over this for so long, she appeared."

Hisui touched his left chest.

Indeed.

She had always been there.

However, did she reappear in her former appearance because of his wish?

"But... perhaps because I didn't choose her, I was unable to choose her between the two, she vanished."

"I believe not. She surely passed on, smiling."

"Eh?"

Without looking at Hisui, Eruru continued calmly.

"A vampire seeks blood in an attempt to fill the void of the life they had lost. To replenish the warmth they have lost from their hearts--That is what I have heard. But she already had no regrets. Because even in her absence, you are able to live on well. So... She is satisfied and chose to disappear, finally returning to inside your body. That is all."

"In the end, I'm still relying on her. That's so lame of me."

Hisui shook his head with a wry smile. Then Mei embraced his arm.

"What are you chatting so happily about? Hi-kun, tonight is the great Christmas Eve, let's... with me tonight..."

"Umm sorry, I absolutely won't let you stay over."

"Then Kujou-kun, with me... My parents won't be home tomorrow, come to my house..."

Before he knew it, Kirika had hugged his other arm.

A lady on each arm. One was an artificial human while the other was a witch.

No matter which side he refused, his life was in danger.

"Well..."

Just as he was caught in a dilemma, Rushella attacked from the front.

"Hey, what are you doing!? You are my servant!"

Saying that, she bared her fangs and bit.

Although the frequency was decreasing, she still thirsted for fresh blood.

"Hey stop it, this is outside!"

Rushella's lips approached.

But she did not use her teeth.

Sucking deeply on Hisui's neck, she only released him after she had sucked enough.

The mark of a vampire's kiss was not left on his neck... It was just the mark of an ordinary kiss.

"Ah, what are you doing? Now how am I supposed to show myself out in public?"

"Shut up, I should have done it a long time ago! Now everyone will know you belong to me!"

"Crap... How do I erase this?"

"Oh my oh my, Hi-kun, why don't I cover it up for you?"

"Or allow me..."

Lips approached again.

The sound of scolding came as a result.

"You are better off dead."

"Are you for real this time...?"

"What are you dallying for? Hurry, time to buy the cake next!"

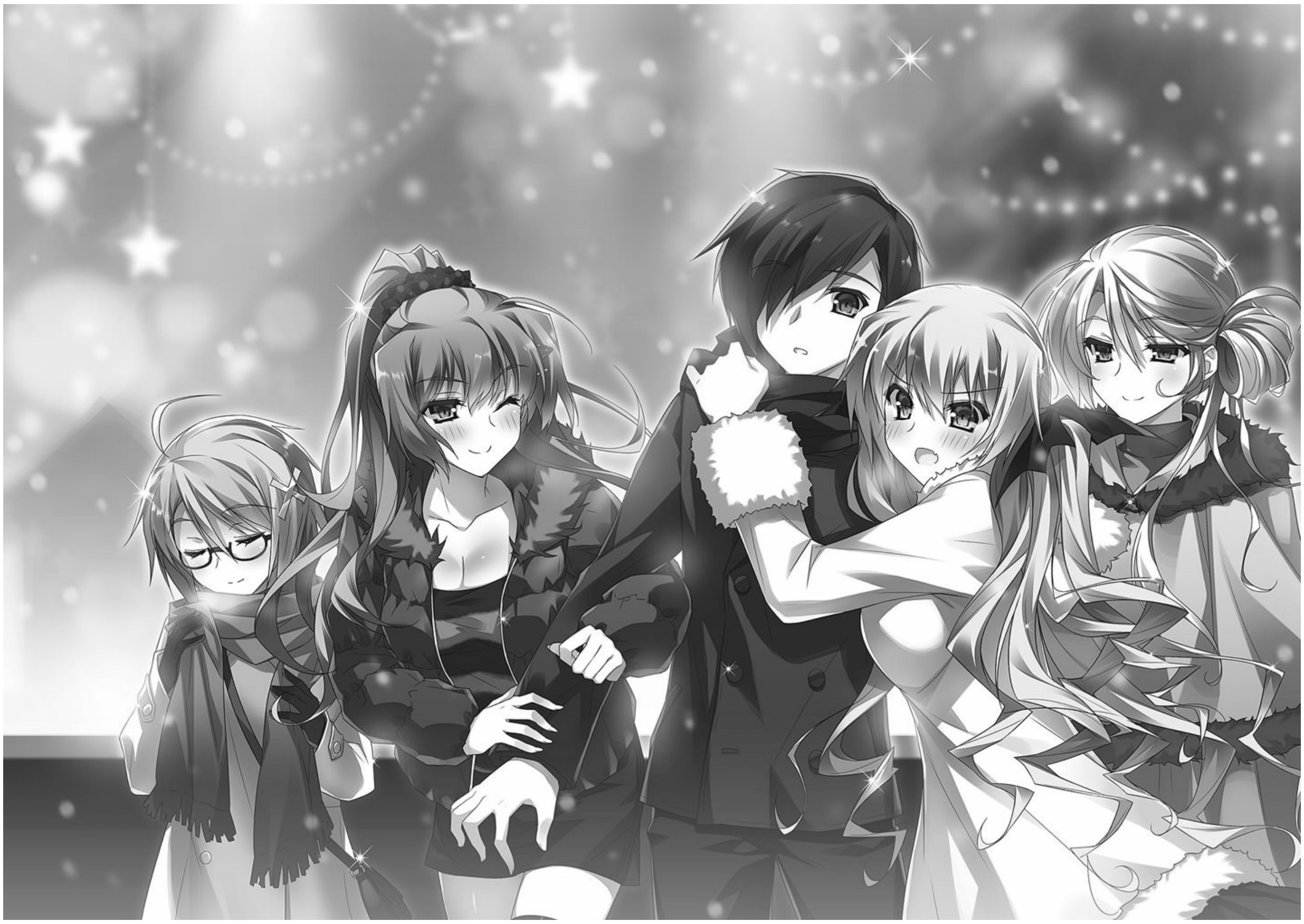
"Okay okay."

The Supernatural Investigations Club members walked under the persisting snowfall.

The lively and unusual days had become the norm.

Kujou Hisui's life of hardship would continue here on.

Probably, it was going to continue forever.



Afterword

Finally, it's the last volume.

First confronted with the danger of almost losing his humanity, then a miraculous survival and apparently frequent crises with his virginity at stake and of course, getting his blood sucked every volume. This protagonist really has life rough.

I think that a vampire's act of blood drinking is a hidden metaphor for many things. In this story, I've thought over it quite a bit and I hope readers can imagine for themselves the unmentionable side of blood drinking.

I've been familiar with vampire stories since I was a child but I never thought I'd write one myself.

Mainly it's because there are so many famous works in this genre so it's almost impossible to find a place to start.

After all, orthodox settings like "getting bitten by a vampire turns you into a vampire" or "superior entities known as True Ancestors exist" are totally unavoidable. Adding my own understanding and blending things thoroughly, in the end, I wrote this series.

Also, the story also selected many well-known monsters as the sub-theme.

Hmm, speaking of orthodox routes, by having the Rushella the useless vampire and the child conception-obsessed Mei, I think I already broke this story.

By the way, here's my personal ranking. Among the monsters, I like Mei the most, followed by Kirika with her amazing feminine charms and girl power, Eruru whom I'd like to bring home as a younger sister, Reina whom I'd like as a friend and finally Touko whom I'd like to encounter in a paranormal adventure.

As for Rushella, well, what should I say? She's like an idol whom I can view from a distance but not defile with touch.

The selling point(?) of this work is ultimately based on the heroine. On this point, I am truly grateful for illustrator Yasaka-san's assistance, whose drawing skills exceed the quality of my writing.

I should also thank the editor in charge who managed to elevate my ideas to this level.

Anyway, I blame myself for writing too slow and causing a lot of trouble for various people. At the same time, I really learned a lot through my experience in writing this series.

I dedicate my sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed to this series and all the readers who are holding this book in their hands. Thank you, everyone.

May we meet again soon in my next work.

Totsuka Yuu

こんにちは、八坂です。
この『銀の十字架とドラキュリア V』で、シリーズ完結との事で、
一読者としてとても寂しく思います…。

十月先生、編集のS様、デザイナー様、
そして最後まで応援してくださった読者の皆様
今まで本当にありがとうございました。

それでは、またいつかどこかで…

Minato

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